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"The Woden Host!" he faintly mutters,
And leans on Wunsch, support to gain.

(See page 87)

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THE WILD HUNTSMAN

A LEGEND OF THE HARTZ

BY

JULIUS WOLFF

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

BY

RALPH DAVIDSON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AFTER DESIGNS BY

WOLDEMAR FRIEDRICH

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
The Knickerbocker Press
1905

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THE Hartz Mountains are massed in wild and rugged beauty on the wide Prussian plain, where they are the first of the German highlands to meet the moist, cold winds from the North Sea. They were the final stronghold of belief in Woden and his sad train of twilight gods, and to-day for the whole German Fatherland they are the home of poetic myth and weird folk-tale. Julius Wolff, their great singer, and the youngest and last of the school of German romantic poets, was born in 1834 at Quedlinburg on the borders of the Hartz land. His novels, dramas, and lyrics have brought him fame, but he became the most popular of living German poets through the powerful and delicate epics that recount in a new form of rhymed narrative the shadowy legends of old Germany. In an ever-changing variety of story and spirit, constant only in a fervent and lofty patriotism, he wrote *Tannhäuser*, *The Ratcatcher of Hamelin*, *The Wild Huntsman*, *The Lorelei*, *The Flying Dutchman*, *Till Eulenspiegel Redivivus*, and *The Pappenheimer*.

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By Wolff's worship of beauty and his delight in love and the returning warmth and color of spring he seems one of the minnesingers reborn. He has never attempted the grand style, and his verse is pleasant and easy flowing. His tender pathos and riotous humor are his own; his own, too, is the new fashioning of the old tales. For him the time-worn legends are still the drama of life, and reveal the deeper mysteries of the human heart; and as the background for the comic and tragic play of forces, he shows nature in harmony with man in his feverish change of mood and emotion.

The Wild Huntsman, the work of thirty years ago, has far surpassed all Wolff's other poems in popularity. Its intensely dramatic story, its musical beauty, its exquisite appreciation of nature brought instant success. The first printing was exhausted in two weeks. The book has since passed through twenty-seven editions in Germany, and in America it has thrice been reprinted in the original tongue.

A fitful legend of the Wild Huntsman is common to all the adventure-loving peoples of the North. In France, sometimes as the holy St. Hubert, sometimes as the chase-mad *Grand Veneur*, he ranged the open glades of Fontainebleau. Wearing a crown of horns, Herne the

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Hunter was long a blasting tradition to the poor who lived on the skirts of Windsor Forest. In the Ross of outer Scotland and the Hebrides, the simple herdsmen were often terrified by his hoarse-winded horn, the din of the wild race of deer and dogs, and the ghostly hoofs quick-beating over the hollow, mist-wrapped hills. Everywhere in Germany the tale was told; from the bleak northern lowlands to the deepest recesses of the Black Forest in the South, where he was a wandering and undying Jew, who denied Christ a drink from a horse-trough, and bade him lap the water collected in a hoof-print.

Wolff took the legend much as he found it in the Hartz, inscribing the poem to the romantic home of his boyhood:

Around thy mountains blows an ancient strain;
High onward borne upon the storm-wind's pinion
It sings a Huntsman wild and his dominion,
And thunderlike is pealed its dread refrain.

He made his Wild Huntsman a vivid reality in a historical setting of the waning Middle Ages. The ruthless Wildgrave of the legend he replaced with a Baron of heroic mould, cursed through headlong passions, but softened at times by human love and pity, and gentle moods of regret. His weird story and the

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mystery and horror of Woden's spectral host he interwove with an idyll of woodland love, the gossip of peasants, dainty tales of the old mythology, and some of the finest nature passages in German poetry.

This translation, undertaken with the poet's permission, attempts to give the story simply and rapidly. The German metre has been carefully preserved, and many famous pages, where it seemed possible to reproduce something of the vigor and beauty of the original, have been translated almost literally. A number of songs have been omitted, and condensation has frequently been necessary.

Woldemar Friedrich, one of the most noted of contemporary German historical painters and illustrators, has placed his designs of the German *édition de luxe* at the disposal of his friend, Mr. F. W. Heine, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, who has redrawn them for this book.

La Porte, Indiana,
September 24, 1905.

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And leans on Wunsch support to gain.
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The Wild Huntsman

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I

At Woden's Mark

HARK to the sounding story
That tells of a deadly fray—
The tourney of the ages—
The combat 'twixt Winter and May!

There 's constant tilting and charging,
The weapons cross and ring,
There 's endless wavering and breaking
In the surging battle of Spring;
Unending turmoil and roaring
Like rush of tide o'er fields,
Unending cracking and clashing
Like swords on ringing shields;
Now clamoring and clanging
As if from brazen bells;
Now rumbling deep, now thundering,
The sound to fury swells.
The wind whirls round the summits
With piteous shrieks and moans,

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Through creaking, snapping tree-tops
  Its ghostly chant intones.
But all the blowing and ferment,
  The misty movement and strife,
Is only the flitting and hovering
  Before the breath of life.
The fluttering and bowing in branches,
  In blade and shrub, accord
Due reverence and greeting
  To the might of a dreadful Lord.
He comes o'er plain and mountain
  With threats upon his tongue;
He spreads affright and terror,
  And thus resounds his song:

On high I ascend
  And course through the air—
My wings I extend—
  Take heed and beware!
Be it night, be it dawn,
  There 's a hush as of death,
And scarcely is drawn
  An audible breath:
I 'm scented afar
  In awe and suspense,
With a dread as of war
  'Midst feeble defense;
And when I at length
Have marshalled my strength,

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With a rush and a shout
I burst out.

I sweep the ocean,
The billows I roll;
Their yeasty commotion
I sway and control.
From my cavernous lip
I trumpet a blast
That tosses the ship
And shivers her mast.
Though upward is sent
From those I despoil
A wail and lament,
From naught I recoil:
Nor heed I, nor care
For curse or for prayer.

Within his rock-built tower
The Glacier feels my power;
I urge him on and make
His lofty brow to shake.
Chaotic, shattered masses,
That stood a frigid wall,
With turrets, tower, and all,
Now cover field and passes:
The avalanche stops not
For cotter or his cot;

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All 'neath a piling mound
Have deep-sunk burial found,—
Blotted out and gone:
Pity have I none.

Wish-wind my name;
Will is my essence;
Might tells my presence:
I am the same
And mine the deed
That blesses the seed;
The genital force
In me has its source;
I fructify Earth,—
Sustain after birth,—
Pour sap into mould,
That life may unfold.
With stirring and teeming
Comes hoping and dreaming,
And rushing about
O'er hill, dale, and lake
I knock and I shout:
Awake! spring, awake!

Thus sings the storm. Wide Nature
Seems conjured by the call,
As if by power of magic
New life were granted all.

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The sap awakens from torpor
  And climbs with vigor aglow;
Its limbs the pine tree stretches
  Dislodging their burden of snow.
The juniper, hemlock, and cedar,
  The sombre resinous fir,
And all, in an armor of needles,
  With joy at the call are astir.
Out of furrowed bark and fissure
  The trickling water drips;
From fretted twigs and branches
  Hang sparkling liquid tips.
As sinks the snowy mantle
  Beneath brown carpeted sands,
On many a leaf, a lakelet
  In the sunlight twinkling stands.

Brief days and hours determine
  The Winter's deplorable fate,—
Dissolved and utterly ruined
  His splendor of princely estate.
His crown no longer glistens,
  Of glittering jewels bereft;
His icicle-sceptre lies shattered,
  And his armor of silver is cleft:
The sovereign seal is broken
  That held all life in bond,—
His brilliant crystal mirror
  Is swept from brook and pond.

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Where diamonds, jewels, and laces
  Once met the dazzled sight,
Now only mere tatters of ermine
  Still cling to sunless height.

The frozen springs burst open;
  The brook swells with the gush,—
Its plunging, foaming waters
  From hill to lowland rush.
Brimful, the swollen river
  Rolls through the anxious land,
And drives the grinding ice-floes
  To distant ocean strand.
The wood is dank and darkling,
  Dense mist is hanging low;
Amidst a breathlike whisper,
  The buds begin to grow,
The roots feel need of stretching,
  For looser soil they yearn;
There comes a listing, longing,
  As when the birds return.

Beware! ye leaves and blossoms,
  Beware of storms from the North!
The Winter turns in fury,
  To kill, he sallies forth.
To you, so young and tender,
  He deals out death and woe;
He hurls the rattling hail-storm,

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And whirls the blinding snow.
Again the streams are captive
Beneath an icy screen;
A chilling mantle covers
The scarce-awakened green.
Anew breaks out the contest,
And man to man engage;
Once more the clashing weapons
Incessant roar and rage.
By day the Spring is victor,
But Winter, through the night,
From his defeat recovers
And strives with all his might.
By stealth he onward marches,
Inflicting many a blow,
And to retreat he forces
His young and gallant foe.
But, with a last wild effort,
Spring rallies for the fight,—
Retakes his lost possessions,—
Puts Winter's host to flight:
Before his valiant squadrons,
With pennons, flashing spears,
With clarion notes of triumph
And loud exulting cheers,
Fly Winter and his henchmen
In pitiable plight,
And merry Spring sits smiling,
Enthroned by victor's right.

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The Bode's limpid waters
  In the Brocken have their source,
And through the Hartz' green mountains
  They sing along their course.
But ere from height to lowland
  The gurgling stream has sped,
And to the gnomes and nixies
  A last farewell has said,
A weird, dread vale it enters,
  Where it must twist and bend
To seek its winding channel
  Through turns without an end.
Rocks, bolder and more lofty
  Than here, can scarce be found,
Nor greener, nor more tangled,
  A wood on German ground.
Here rise, with buttress and rampart,
  Vast bulwarks and towers high;
Huge piers and pillars colossal
  Time's ravages defy.
Aslant, and leaning over,
  Hang threatening, massive blocks,
As if they had but halted
  To span the gorge with rocks.
Here cleft and crevice open;
  On cliffs, aloft in air,
Crouch animals, enchanted,
  And stony faces stare.
Here clings with thirsty fibre

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The shrub to rocky wall,—
Strikes root in fissure and cranny
And cleaves to foothold small.

High up are raging and splashing
Fierce blasts and sheets of rain;
Low down the frothy torrent
Is writhing and struggling in vain.
The waters dart into eddies,
And frisk and fret and moan;
The surging, seething billows
Wash and hollow the stone.
Where'er you pause or ramble,
On ridges low or high,
The restless, rushing river
Seems murmuring ever nigh.
Gaze o'er the jagged embankment,—
Through riven rocks behold
The bowels of Earth laid open
To secret depths untold.

Above all others rises
One peak to dizzy height;
Nor could the sharp-clawed eagle
On its steep wall alight.
The gray and hoary mountain
Bears on its lordly crest
A monstrous horse's hoof-mark—
By mighty force impressed;

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The Wild Huntsman

No fiery steed e'er bridled,
By mortal man bestrode,
Has stamped the print in granite
Upon this sky-perched road.
To Sleipnir's foot tradition
Still links this Runic sign,
And victims immolated
On Woden's ancient shrine.

Its song the storm wind hushes,
As darkness all enshrouds;
Beyond the lofty mountains
Fast muster lowering clouds:
A tall majestic figure
Stands near the ancient mark;
His beard is long and flowing,
His mantle wide and dark.
A broad-brimmed hat protects him
From wind and threatful sky;
Beneath it glows, malignant,
A single fiery eye.
Down at his feet crouch fawning
Two wolves of aspect grim;
Around his head two ravens,
In flight, encircle him.
Now slowly upward pointing,
He waves his slender spear,
And with it draws a circle
High in the upper sphere.

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Athwart the sable cloud-realm
  Down darts a gleaming flash;
Loud rolling peals of thunder
  Throughout the valley crash.
A thousand echoes answer
  From all the mountains nigh,
While dazzling bursts of lightning
  Oft rend the lurid sky.
The branches stir and rustle
  As speeds the passing Form;
Then yields the budding forest
  To the early thunderstorm.

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II

Spring

IT blows and blusters many a night
With rattling hail and dripping rain,
And each day tries, though oft in vain,
To turn the wind or stay its might,
To sweep the clouds aside once more,
And to the sky its blue restore.
But when the battling storms have done,
From his bright portal steps the Sun;
Among Earth's creatures manifold
He scatters lavishly his gold,
As if in prodigal display
He 'd spend it in a single day.

The wood, where mist and darkness lurk,
Awakens from its sombre dream;
A thousand fairies seem at work
To carry out some mystic scheme.
Fresh vigor fills the dormant cells;
The beech's slender bud now swells,

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And patiently it strives to shed
Its shiny scales of ruby red;
'T would break its bonds, and free and brave
Its tiny, tender pennons wave.
The elder and the hazel tree,
  Forgetting first their winter's woe,
Once more from icy fetters free
  Their loosely folded spindles show.
And here, in threes and fours, hang down
The little catkins, gold and brown;
While near, within a shadowed nook,
Where gently flows the winding brook,
Demurely through her peaceful life
Abides the hazel's blossom-wife,
And over her she bears aloft
A stately, pluméd, crimson tuft.
In shining linen, white as snow,
Is wrapped the sable thorn of sloe;
The elm 's abloom, the asp has spun
  Soft silk to form long, curly locks,
And Mistress Willow has begun
  To herd and tend her lambkin flocks.
The oak alone stands gaunt and bare,
Its knotty framework, here and there,
Aflutter yet in April's sun
With last year's leaves of faded dun.
But when the bud has burst its bands
And each notched, glossy leaf expands,
With massing foliage overspread

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The swaying boughs again display,
In hues of golden, green and red,
The splendor of the dawning day.

Then, where the forest floor is clear
Of fallen cones and leafage sere,
Dame Nature, who but seldom stints,
A carpet weaves of rarest tints,
And like a maid on festal day
She decks herself in spring array.
Look! ere one knew it was about,
Amid the green, half hidden yet,
A marvel, sweet and blue, peeps out—
It is the first dear violet.
Oh, welcome! joy and cheer will spread
From out thy downy, leafy bed;
Bloom on, thou child of March, nor mind
The flatteries of the playful wind;
Do not his roguish theft resent,
E'en though he steal thy fragrant scent;
With it he 'll wake thy sisters fair,
That all may in the springtide share.
The brave, wee chick-weed leads the throng;
Soon snow-drop hangs her pearly bell,
Gold dandelion and adder's-tongue,
Hepatica and pimpernel,
Anemone and daisy true,
Sweet cicely and columbine,
With buttercup and meadow rue,

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And many a radiant herb and vine,
Entwining in a garland gay
To decorate the barren wood,
Ere the musicians come to play
And wake the guests to festive mood.

They soon appear, all brisk and glad,
The little folk, a motley hive;
Too oft their days are brief and sad,
And constant perils scarce survive.
The insect broods the stir have heard,
Attendant on the vernal tide,
And though in coffins deep interred,
Revive and fling their shrouds aside;
From folds of withered leaves they crawl,
And struggle, whirr, and wriggle free;
From cracks and crevices they sprawl,
Through crust of earth and chink in tree.

And then comes flitting through the air
A blithesome and familiar throng
Of feathered vagrants, free of care,
Who hasten back with glee and song.
Their warbling through the wood is heard:
"'T is spring!" is piped from yonder bough,
And merrily the air is stirred,—
"'T is spring! 'T is spring!" reëchoes now.
One found a way, though bread was scant,
To gain an honest livelihood

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Through winter's peril, pain, and want,
  And robbers' bold assault withstood.
A roving life another led,—
  Droned like a gypsy through the land,—
To find some table, ready spread
  Each day, by God's providing hand.
A third one came across the sea,
  And weary must have been the flight,
But since the brook of ice is free,
  The hardships borne seem brief and slight.
They meet again from far and near,
  And greetings pass from spray to spray:
"How fares it, friend? When cam'st thou here?
  Did aught befall thee on the way?"
While one small traveller makes reply,
  He drolly stretches legs and wings,
And as he shakes his feathers dry
  His dress in quaint confusion brings;
He perks and preens himself; coquets
  Like some coy singer in a play,
Then jauntily his bill he whets
  And bursts into a merry lay.
The cross-bill, gay in crimson paint,
  Hangs head-down from a hemlock cone;
He is the nail-smith's patron saint,
  And with the first has northward flown.
His thoughts run to an early brood,
  So on a bough, from morn till late,
He phrases in a loving mood

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The notes to win his chosen mate.
The titmouse chirps in shady glen,
The linnet carols soft and true,
And like a flash the restless wren
The dense-grown, thorny hedge flits through.
Chaffinch attunes his double trill,
The thrush ne'er fails to swell the chimes,
Blithe goldfinch joins, and with his bill
Woodpecker hammers as he climbs.
Sharp quiver forth the little throats
From bough and thicket all day long;
Deep from their bird-souls gush sweet notes,
And love the burden of their song.
Then, as the spring unites their lives
And wedlock puts their love to test,
Each pair in noble conflict strives
To build the most ingenious nest.
Nor rouses them, nor causes fright,
The warning of the hawk's shrill cry,
Prey-seeking, from his aerie's height,
In spiral windings drawing nigh.
He peers within a shadowy glen
To seize the bird that lures him on,
Where rocky cleft and pathless fen
In darkened mazes bar the sun;
Here lie the victims of the wind,—
Uprooted, mouldering, ancient pines;—
Here lichens thrive, and fungus kind;
Soft mosses creep 'neath sprawling vines,

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And tangled briars and spiny thorn
  Along the pathway form a hedge;
While ferns, still plumeless and forlorn,
  Like hairy snails hide midst the sedge.

And here awakes the drowsy bear,
  Who long in winter's sleep has lain;
Half-starved he leaves his hidden lair
  To sniff the balmy air again.
The badger opes his bolted door,
  And rooting leaves his kennel home;
The hedgehog ventures out once more,
  Though too distrustful far to roam;
The deer is nibbling in the glade,
  The hart now bears a crownless head,
The boar seeks pool or tarn to wade
  And wallow in a slimy bed.
Where'er the eye may chance to fall
  It meets green nature's wide expanse—
Flags fluttering in bright festival
  To hail the welcome spring's advance.
The forest vaults its leafy dome
  'Neath sunlit sky, in starry night;
To myriad lives it grants a home
  And stretches far till lost to sight.

Who sees the weeks of springtime flying?
  Who marks the change from day to day,

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Or counts the clustering buds that open
As June succeeds to jocund May?
There roves within the shade-cool forest
A hunter in the Count's employ,—
A youth in whose firm traits of manhood
Still linger traces of the boy.
His bright and open face emerges
From out a hooded cloak of brown,
That falls about his sturdy shoulders
And o'er his head is lightly thrown.
In doublet clad of homely leather,
With bugle hanging from his belt,
He bears for weapons spear and cross-bow,—
A feather 's in his cap of pelt.
Though huntsmanlike is his equipment,
He seeks not sport upon his way;
To hunt or trap is not his purpose,
Yet watchfulness his eyes betray;
As warder, he must find a poacher,
Who stealthily has slain a doe,
And though incurring unknown peril,
Meet punishment he would bestow.

As on he goes he hears a rustling,—
Attent he listens; then he sees
A fox's brood from out the covert
Frisk playfully among the trees.
In hiding, he observes their frolic
With naught in sight to augur harm,

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When suddenly they seek their burrow
And tumble in with wild alarm.
On instant guard, he waits in silence,—
His arrow on the straining thong,—
But speedily he drops the cross-bow,
For sweet there rings a maiden's song:

A fairy flower blooms in the wood
Where silver moonbeams lie,
And he who wears it o'er his heart
Will feel love's witchery.

Ah! could I find the secret glade
And pluck this fateful flower,
I 'd give it to a comely lad
And watch its mystic power.

Oh, blackbird! thou art wondrous wise!
Bring me this blossom fair!
And do thou then disclose to me
Which youth it shall ensnare.

The singing ends; the singer falters;
She shrinks in fear, yet soon reflects:
"The handsome hunter will not harm thee,"
And onward then her steps directs;
But rudely he obstructs the pathway:
"Whence art thou? Whither wilt thou go?
I 'll know thine errand in our woodland——"

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And here his questions cease to flow,
For from the blue eyes of the maiden
Laughs spring, as buds peep from a spray;
Since wrath and smiles are poorly mated
His frowning sternness soon gives way;
The blushing maiden breaks the silence,
Less timid now, she archly pleads
While showing him her half-filled basket:
"I am but gathering shepherd's weeds;
My grandam needs them for a potion,
They have a wondrous healing power
To still the blood and lessen fever,
If boiled at full moon half an hour."
The youth scarce listens to her prattle,
Nor on the basket rests his gaze,
But, as he stands, his eyes still linger
Upon her winsome sunlit face.
"What is thy name?" at length he asks her.
"I 'm Waldtraut, and my father's cot
Stands plain in sight on yonder hillside;
This narrow road leads to the spot.
He earns his bread by charcoal burning,
And here he toils the livelong day;
Dost thou not know the collier Volrat?
He often takes this forest way."

Then on and on they stroll together
Where'er the sylvan pathways wind,
For each of them all self-forgetting

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The other's presence has in mind.
As genial sunshine often opens
The leaves and blossoms in a day,
So two fresh guileless hearts awaken
'Neath glowing Youth's transforming sway.
Bright Spring! where art thou now incarnate?
Art thou in bloom and bird-song blent?
Or in the joyance of these mortals
Hast thou thy pure embodiment?
For lo! where droop the verdant branches,
And Eden-like the wood doth seem,
There steals along in blissful silence
Love's tender, blessed, springtide dream!

Now must they part, nor longer tarry,
And Ludolf's words his hopes confess:
"Wilt thou return then for a trysting?"
She smiles and shyly answers: "Yes."
They look around at one another
And nod and wave from time to time;
Her homeward path leads through the valley,
Across the mountain he must climb.
Well on his way, a cliff he reaches,
With nimble foot ascends it fast,
And raising to his lips the bugle,
Salutes her with a hunter's blast.

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III

The Mountain Castle

WHERE the gorgelike valley widens
And Luppbode's waters mingle
With the Bode's raging current,
Treseburg, a stately castle,
Crowned the summit of a mountain.
Here as feudal liege and master
Dwelt the Count Hans Hackelberend
With his fair and noble daughter,
With his horses, hounds and falcons,
And his wardens, skilled in hunting.
'T was a sky-perched, aerie fastness,
Fitly destined for the housing
Of a knight and ardent huntsman.
Lone the hill and ancient castle
Proudly towered o'er the valley,
That with woodland, mead and water
Peacefully extended onward.
At each turn, the rock-built structure
Rising with its time-worn granite,

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Midst the all-engirdling forest,
Challenged the approaching traveller.
Down the stream the vale grew narrow,
Where high cliffs, like walls, enclosed it;
Round the castled hill the Bode
Ran its course in snakelike windings,
Till it all but formed a circle.
Steeply rose the bluffs and sternly
That upheld the frowning stronghold.
All impregnable its bulwarks,
From one side alone besiegers
Could attack its beetling turrets.
Here a heavy draw-bridge carried
O'er a moat, long dry and empty,
Whose sheer banks in safe enclosure
Held a powerful stag imprisoned.
On each side the court extended,
By thick, solid walls protected,
With their inner wooden ramparts,
For defense against assailants.
At the entrance stood a tower
Reared to overarch the gateway.
Stables, armory and kennel
Were of oaken timbers builded;
But of stone the castle dwelling
For the master and his household,
And his retinue of servants.
From its granite base, the Bergfried
Raised its head in bold defiance,

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With the Count its only tenant,
Save the warder at his outlook,
High within the tower's turret.
Antlers huge decked halls and chambers;
Under them hung diverse weapons,
Swords and lances, helmets, armor,
Faded belts and tattered banners.
Here and there on stone engraven,
Or in colored, leaded casements,
Showed the family escutcheon.

On an afternoon in springtime,
Gerhard Korn, the falcon trainer,
In the gate-tower hall sat working;
Near him stood the archer Bruno,
Honored both for years of service
As their master's chase attendants.
Gerhard, gray with many winters,
Weather-hardened, short and stocky,
Had in charge the castle stables,
And was head of all the servants.
He was famous as a falconer,
And at Falconworth in Flanders
As a youth had been apprenticed.
Bruno was but little younger;
Somewhat taller and more slender,
Firm of hand and eagle-sighted,
And the Count's best cross-bow archer.
He was bending o'er a grindstone

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With a growing heap of arrows
Lying on the floor beside him.
First, the pointed tips of iron
He would sharpen; then, selecting
Those that seemed to him most perfect,
Steeped them in an inky mixture,
Made of verdigris and gall nuts,
That would turn them black as raven.
Ready skinned, upon the table,
Stretched a full-grown wild swan, captured
By an eager new-trained falcon,
At a recent early trial.
Gerhard worked with tow and needle
Deftly dressing it for mounting;
For the swan in all its beauty,
With majestic snowy plumage
Was to hover o'er the pillow
Of the Count's beloved young daughter.
In a hoop, not far from Gerhard,
Fastened to the raftered ceiling,
Swung a closely hooded falcon,
With short jesses for a fetter;
And without a pause the falconer
Ever kept the hoop in motion,
For the waking and the hunger
Made it ready for the casting.

Valentin, the busy hostler,
Young in years and goodly featured,

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Entered now and joined the others,
With a surly look exclaiming:
"Wunsch I can control no longer;
In his stall he paws and worries,
Till I dread to go anear him."
"Who of us can blame the stallion?
Are we not like him impatient
For the open?" cried the falconer.
"Let the man who would, now ride him,"
Growled the groom, "for I will never
Risk my bones again upon him;
I am still all aches and bruises
From the time when last he threw me."
"None except the Count can curb him";
Gerhard said, "but in the Bergfried
There is still foul weather brewing,
For the clouds hang low and threatening."
Bruno spoke: "I saw a raven
On the ramparts after sunrise;
Hoarsely croaked the bird ill-omened,
Ever on its left leg resting."
"Thou must mean the black-robed brother
From the Walkenrieden Convent:
No good tidings can we hope for
From his weighty parchment letter,"
Laughed the hostler. "Monks and goodness!"
Sneered the archer, "priests and convents!
Good has never come from either!"
"Hast thou heard more of the rising

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That the stubborn peasants started
In the autumn at Muehlhausen?"
Then asked Gerhard. "Yes, in Kempten
Bands of them attacked the convent,"
Answered Valentin, "and meekly
Their Prince Abbot sued for mercy.
But the priests deserve no better;
Let the rebels turn against them,
So our castle 's unmolested!
Hark! whose bugle now is sounding?"
"'T is but Wenzel's on the tower;
Well I know that ancient greeting
To the earliest stork's returning,
And the overflowing tankard
That is his by warder's custom."
"Humph," growled Gerhard, "there he hurries
To Agnete for his guerdon;
He is all too prone to tipple—
'T is unseemly for a warder—
Strange it is, when drink is mentioned,
How one's thirst at once needs quenching!
Velten, go to my good woman;
Say I also need refreshing,
And forget not to remind her
That she fill the largest tankard,
So a gnat upon its margin
Would not wet its feet while drinking;
Then we all the stork can honor."

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As the hostler left them, Ludolf
Through the open doorway entered.
"Hast thou found the trace?" asked Gerhard.
"Yes, they still are in their kennel."
"Who?" "The foxes." "Well I know it;
But I mean far other quarry."
Then he paused awhile, reflecting,—
"I could name the reckless poacher,
And the Count will kill the culprit,
If at stalking deer we catch him."
"Whence know'st thou?" and "Tell, who is it?"
Anxiously the hunter asked him.
"'T is the collier Bertram Volrat!"
"If 't is he," replied the archer,
"Hope not that ye 'll ever take him;
For he has the magic fern seeds,
And unseen through air can vanish
When into his shoes he strews them;
These his mother Aulke gives him—
Who 's a witch ye must remember."
"I care little," grumbled Gerhard,
"For his tricks and all his cunning;
I will soon o'ermatch the fellow!"
Bent upon their work and chatting
Neither Gerhard nor the archer
Had marked Ludolf standing silent,
With his staring eyes fixed on them,

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Wrapt in thought and ever playing
With the chain that held his bugle.

"Do ye know?" asked Bruno sternly,
"How the monks of Walkenrieden
Played a shameful trick upon us?
Though their convent is the richest,
With its chapels, farms, and houses,
Not a hamlet is exempt from
Paying tithes and taxes to them.
Mines of ore and endless acres
Yield them wealth in great abundance,
And still greater is their profit
From the wonder-working image,
And the thorns, a precious relic,
From the crown of our Lord Jesus.
On the way to Rome, their pilgrims
Never want for pleasant shelter
Under roofs they own in common.
Where good wine grows, never do they
Lack for vineyards nor for cellars.
Years ago, the Emperor granted
Hunting rights in wider lordship
To the friars of the Convent.
Far as pealed the bell's slow clanging
From the walls of Walkenrieden,
Feathered game might still be taken.
Then the tricksters had a bell cast—
None so large is in our mountains—

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High they placed it in the belfry,
Where it opens toward the forest,
That the sound might carry farther,
And enlarge their hunting precincts.
Now must we look on in silence,
Though we meet them at our noose-line,
Or the fowling floor, or nearer;
And the curséd, tonsured rascals
Fatten on our snipes and wood-grouse."

Valentin now brought the tankard,
To whose foaming beer was added
Red herb-bennet and wild sage leaves,
With their strong and bitter flavor.
Gerhard's glance showed his misgivings:
"Bah! the gnat would be a marvel
That could sip from this cup's margin.
Velten, clear thee of suspicion!
Canst thou show a beard unwetted?"
Now the kennel boy, named Telie,
Entered; though a lad no longer,
Yet the name had still clung to him.
"By my troth," said Gerhard laughing,
"I believe the boy is keener
Than a hound; afar he scented
Our great beer mug circling freely.
Come and drink, thou kennel captain!"
"Let us see what thou has huddled,
Like a baby, in thy bosom?"

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Asked the hostler, as his fingers
Prodded Telie's bulging jerkin.
Gently then from out its shelter
Drew he forth a puppy boar-hound.
" 'T is a sickling," answered Telie,
" 'T will not eat, and whines and whimpers."
Gerhard eyed the puppy closely.
"Didst thou take a bunch of buckthorn,
Nailing it outside the kennel,
Thereby warding off the witches?"
"Yes, in truth, both out and inside."
"Dost thou always carry with thee
She-wolf's heart, the cure for rabies?"
"Yes," said Telie; and the falconer,
In a lowered voice continued:
" *Take the fresh green twigs of willow,*
Twist and wind them in a wreath;
Slip it o'er the ailing body,
Look above and underneath;
If it withers, sound and hale
Is the cur from tip to tail."
Then in louder voice resuming:
"Do not let the master know it;
He is sore of heart and moody.
E'en his daughter, loved and gracious,
Cannot still his fretful storming.
In his wrath a crystal goblet
At my good-wife's feet he shattered,
When he found his wine lacked flavor.

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Yet he knows spiced wine is harmful
When a man is hot with fever.
Had the monstrous bear cowed Willé
'T would have been the Count's last hunting;
Torn and bleeding from the battle
All the other dogs went skulking.
Four weeks has the wound been covered
With fit unguents and concoctions.
Illness and restraint unwonted
Sorely vex our fiery master."
"Soon, methinks, the time is coming
When we 'll hunt again," said Bruno,
"Else what need of sharpened arrows?
Tell me, lad—" he turned to Ludolf,
Who sat silent in the corner—
"What ill news has come upon thee?
Thou seem'st speech-bereft and doleful."
"Of the poacher I am thinking;"
Answered Ludolf. But his thoughts were
Only of the poacher's daughter,
Who nor knew nor had suspicion
Of her father's deadly danger.

In the oak-walled Bergfried chamber
Lay the Count Hans Hackelberend,
Propped on pillows, half reclining
On a couch o'erspread and softened
With the speckled skins of moose-deer.
At his feet, the mastiff Willé,

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With his head between his forepaws,
Stretched upon a shaggy bearskin.
His the strength that saved his master
When the savage bear attacked him.
Near, and where the Count could reach it,
In the corner, leaned the cross-bow,
Whose long stock and butt were inlaid
Lavishly with pearl and silver.
Often would he take and aim it,
That his weakened arm might strengthen.
Wan appeared the knight and pallid,
Though so tall and mighty-sinewed;
Hair and beard of raven blackness
Made him paler still by contrast;
Bold his Roman nose projected,
And his brow was seamed with furrows;
Dark and deep-sunk eyes cast glances
Sharp as arrow points, exacting
Swift compliance with his orders.
On a settle near a casement
Sat his only child, Wulfhilde,
Radiant as a rose unfolding
On a morn in early summer.
Round her face thick, wavy tresses
In their golden lustre shimmered;
While her graceful, stately figure,
Clad in robes of silken samite,
Close-enfolding, softly clinging,
Showed in all its youthful beauty.

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'Neath her hands, upon the table,
Lay a frame with broidered colors,
And her white and slender fingers
Deftly worked a diapered bridle
For her dappled gray's proud forehead.
Leaning on the casement's mullion
Stood young Albrecht of Loseinen.
Firm his lips were, and scarce hidden
By a curling beard of flaxen.
He was Hackelberend's godchild,
And had sought his uncle's castle,
There to learn 'neath Gerhard's guidance
Falconry and skill in hunting.
In his hand he held a parchment
While he scanned his kinsman's features.
"Read that once again," the Count bade.
Then a second time read Albrecht:
"Inasmuch as it is neither
Christian-like nor meet, that neighbors
To the realm resort for justice,
We still hope that our contention
Will in amity be settled,
Giving us the right of deer-chase
Anywhere within the hearing
Of the bells of Walkenrieden."
"Never!" cried the Count. "Bah! neighbors!
Water he 's to have, and pasture;
Flying fowl and fish I 'll grant him

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During days of Lent and fasting;
Snaring hare I will permit him,
Nor forbid the catch of cray-fish;
But the right of hounds and deer-chase
Appertains as fief and tenure
To the castle, never doubted
Or opposed by claim or hindrance
During two men's lives, full measured.
Wood for ploughs and wood for barrows,
With the windfall will I grant him;
But I 'll give him none for building.
Let him sharply heed this warning:
If a monk falls in our clutches
Caught at stalking deer, then mercy
Will avail him more than justice!
Suit before the realm he talks of!
Let him, if it is his pleasure!
What fear I this doughty member
Of the Upper Saxon Council?
Knight is less to him than Abbot!
Like a solitary screech-owl
Sits he brooding in his convent.
Face to face I 've never met him,—
But read on! I 'll hear the finish
Of his insolent epistle!"
"Item: as unworthy servant
Of the Lord, and faithful guardian
Of his Holy Church, we warn you
Hence forever to abandon

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Wolff, J.
Der wilde jäger
Berl. 1887
20548.9

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All your wickedness of living;
Nor set scandalous example
With the hunt and reckless coursing
During festivals and feast days,
In the midst of pious Christians;
And, attending to the welfare
Of your soul, to seek our chapel
For confession and due penance;
Otherwise, the Church will justly
Punish you for your offences."
"Foolish, arrogant old bigot!"
Roared the Count, as, flushed and trembling,
From his couch he sprang in anger.
Willé growled and eyed his master.
"Yes, good Willé, neither of us
Cares a straw for priestly ranting!
Let him turn his red nose elsewhere!
Let him keep it on his Gospels,
Bound in leather made of pig-skin,
But not meddle with the hunter!
If the Archfiend in his body
Should attempt to stop my hunting,
By his horns and tail I 'd hurl him
From the castle! And this scare-crow
Dares presume to check and cross me!
All the Church's creeds and convents
Stand for cant and superstition!
'Soul's salvation'? Bosh and nonsense!
All are worthless, empty phrases

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Like their 'bliss in life hereafter'!
Hunter's joy I crave! None other!
That 's my creed and my salvation!
To my hounds I 'd rather listen
Than to bells forever clanging;
Hunter's shout, halloo and bugle
Are the 'Sanctus' for my chanting!
Were the crucifix a cross-bow
I would tear it from the altar
To demolish all their idols!"
Neither Albrecht nor Wulfhilde
Dared to answer or deter him
As he raved about in fury,
Deaf to argument or prayer.
Scornful rolled his eyes and glittered
In his pallid, ghostlike visage.
Like a caged and mighty lion
That 's an hungered, strode he trembling
Up and down the wide apartment.
"I am done with salves and unguents
And enchantments. All are worthless!
Four long weeks that seem eternal
Am I forced to curb my longing;
Now, these walls no more shall hold me
Banished from the hunt and forest!
Wait! 't is well-nigh Corpus Christi;
Thursday next our loudest bugles
Shall resound near Walkenrieden,
And announce within their cloisters

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How I come to them for penance!
Go at once, call Gerhard to me!"

Albrecht's glances met his cousin's
Ere he went to do as bidden.
Wulfhild'then approached her father,
Who had slowly grown more tranquil,
Yet in measured strides kept pacing;
And, her arm in his, she pleaded
With sweet tenderness: "Dear father,
Canst thou not defer this trial?
Thou 'rt still pale; thy wonted vigor
Has from long confinement suffered."
"Five more days till Corpus Christi,"
He replied, "full time and over;
For my strength will now come quickly."
"First on smaller quarry practise
With the cross-bow; take the horn-owl;
Sit and rest within the crow-lodge."
"That I will!" the Count assented,
"But we hunt on Corpus Christi,
Dead or living, and I swear it!"
"Good!" said she, "but I 'll ride with thee."
Chidingly and almost sternly
Looked the father at his daughter;
Then more kindly he responded:
"Thou shouldst first try thy fleet Redcheek;
Learn if he is well conditioned,
And the rein now quickly answers;

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Therefore ride him for a hawking,
And let Albrecht be thy escort."
Was it lingering glow of sunset
That through deep embrasured casement
Fell upon her golden tresses,
And o'erspread her cheeks with roses?

Albrecht soon returned with Gerhard.
"Now, old fellow, for the hunting!"
Called the Count in tone exultant.
"Our good friend of Walkenrieden
Has sent word that he forbids it.
Hear our answer: Make all ready
For a hunt on Corpus Christi!"
"Sir, it is the Sacred Blood's Day,"
Timidly the old man faltered.
He, alone, as eldest, ventured
Now and then upon remonstrance,
Though his beaming eye showed clearly
How the love of Church and hunting
In good Gerhard's soul contended.
"What of Blood's Day! Foolish twaddle!
Art thou monk or valiant hunter?
Vex me not with arrant nonsense!"
Scoffed the Count. "Thyself and Ludolf
Start out early on the morrow.
Track me out a full-branched crown-stag.
Bear to Wunsch the welcome tidings:
Soon we 'll hunt, and I shall ride him.

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He is chafing for the forest."
"Sir," spoke Gerhard, "do you truly
Mean so soon to mount the stallion?
He 's unruly in the stable;
Valentin can scarcely curb him."
"Silence! or I 'll blow the bugle,
Swing myself astride the saddle,
And all night tear through the forest!"
Roared the wrathful Hackelberend.
Gerhard mumbling left the chamber,
And espied, ere she could vanish,
His good-wife, the Dame Agnete.
Straight she feigned that duties called her
To the lonely Bergfried's hallways.
"Thou here, woman?" scowled the falconer,
"Fie upon thee; thou hast listened!
For thy penance and thy pardon
Send me now a well-filled tankard."
"Dar'st thou hunt on Corpus Christi?"
Quavered piously Agnete.
"Silence! Do as I have bidden,"
Ordered Gerhard from the stairway.
"What a life of sin and evil;"
Muttered she, "thou 'rt ever tippling!"

Gerhard joined his hunting comrades
In the hall, now brightly lighted
By two blazing pine wood torches.
Bruno, Valentin and Ludolf

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Sprawled upon a bench, while Telie
Leaned against the rock-hewn chimney;
And upon the oaken table,
With his bandy legs adangle,
Perched the hunchbacked warder, Wenzel,
Asking each to share the stork-drink
Measured out to him unstinted.
All were gay and making merry,
And above the joyful clamor
Rang a sounding huntsman's chorus:

Away! Away! ye huntsmen fleet,
Who serve a valiant knight;
All day about the wood we beat,
The chase is our delight.
With spear and bow
Equipped we go;
Through castle and through hall
We sound our bugle call:
Hift! Hift! Hal-lo-lo!
Ty-u-ho! Dor-i-do!

Where hies, where flies the noble deer?
Seek! Seek! my dog! Seek! Seek!
Scent right and left and far and near,
From fen to mountain peak.
We heed not thorns,
Nor hoof nor horns,
And ne'er will stay our pace

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Until we end his race.
Hift! Hift! Hal-lo-lo!
Ty-u-ho! Dor-i-do!

Then for the inn and its good cheer!
No hunter there fares ill;
Enamored of our wild career
Fair maids our tankards fill.
Mid merry laugh
We pledge and quaff,
And sing and dance and play
To chase dull care away.
Hift! Hift! Hal-lo-lo!
Ty-u-ho! Dor-i-do!

"By my troth, thou canst be generous,
Wenzel, thus to share thy portion,"
Gerhard gulped deep from his bumper,
"Freely drink! For more is coming;
'Huntsman, Hail!' we all can pledge thee."
And he drained the frothing liquor,
While he told his fellow wardens
What the Count of each expected.

Christel, Wulfhild's comely handmaid,
With a brimming jug now entered.
"Tarry, lass, and pledge the warder";
Cried the groom, "why shouldst thou hurry?"
"Huntsman, Hail!" she gaily answered;

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And the foaming tankard raising,
Tittered, laughed and kept on laughing
Till she could not drink a swallow.
Telie threw his arms about her;
But the maiden stoutly struggled,
And escaped, her kiss withholding.
Mid hilarious cheer and laughter,
To the lute then sang the warder:

A merry crew of four oft met
In every kind of weather;
And forth upon their way they set
O'er hill and dale together.
The name of one was Thirsty Lip,
With Laughing Lip much smitten;
Another one was Singing Lip
And Kissing Lip, his kitten.

When Singing Lip a ditty sung,
Then Kissing Lip would cheer him;
When Thirsty Lip the pitcher swung,
Then Laughing Lip sat near him;
When Kissing Lip her mouth would bow,
Then Singing Lip kept winking;
When Laughing Lip her pearls did show,
Then Thirsty Lip quit drinking.

But now, from sheerest accident,
And then, by shy collusion,

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Things pell-mell, topsy-turvy went,
Creating much confusion.
Thus Singing Lip and Laughing Lip
Got mixed sometimes—no wonder!
And Thirsty Lip and Kissing Lip
Would likewise often blunder.

At times it chanced, that Singing Lip
Had thirst that needed quenching;
And in his stead, then, Thirsty Lip
Sang with a will, unflinching.
And Laughing Lip in happy vein
To kissing turned thereafter;
While Kissing Lip could not refrain
From hearty peals of laughter.

Thus the jolly hunting comrades
With both song and drink made merry
In the castle, till the fleeting
Hours of night to sleep persuaded;
While without, the silent moonlight
Wove its spell o'er all the forest.
Valley, rock and mountain rested
Here in light, and there in shadow;
Deep the stillness, broken only
By a distant hooting owlet;
And the Bode's waters glided
Gently past with sheen of silver.

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IV

Forest Rest

COCKNELS and darnels and quivering grass,
With the pink sprays of the heather,
Buttercups culled in a bright golden mass,
Speedwell and daisies I'll gather.
Primrose and fragrant germander between
Blend with the honey-filled clover—
Forest-grown posies, the daintiest seen,
Waft your sweet scent to my lover!

Singing to her forest brethren,
Like the spirit of the wildwood
Waldtraut wanders 'neath its arches,
Free as are the roving zephyrs,
Plucking flowers upon her pathway.
Here, she finds the ants hill-building;
There, espies an empty bird's nest;
Peers among the hazel bushes,
Chides the ones that seem unfruitful,
As if dryad she or guardian

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Of each gentle sylvan creature.
Now she stoops with words of pity
For an herb with tear-filled blossoms:
"Poor Waywait! Art still forsaken?
Hope thou on! For time may bring thee
Him for whom thou 'rt ever yearning."
And she flits along half-humming:

She waited long, a pale young maid;
Lone through the day and night she staid
For him she loved, by the wayside.
Waywait! Waywait!

Said she: "Though I strike root in ground,
Till Judgment Day and Trumpet Sound
I'll bide for thee by the wayside!"
Waywait! Waywait!

The lad forgot the pledge he gave;
And there upon her lonely grave
A floweret blooms by the wayside.
Waywait! Waywait!

The summer comes; the summer goes;
The autumn wind o'er the heather blows;
A floweret weeps by the wayside.
Waywait! Waywait!

As her song's soft cadence ceases
In the brush she hears a rustling,

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And, behold, a fox made captive!
"Why, thou sly one, where 's thy cunning?"
Thus she playfully salutes him,
"Thou, of all deceit the master,
By dull man to be outwitted!
Nay, thy snapping will not help thee;
But since one must aid one's neighbors,
An thou bite not, I will free thee."
As the lock yields to her pressure
Reynard, sly and nimble-footed,
Speeds into the friendly shadows.
Gleeful is the maiden's laughter
As she sets the trap and baits it;
Then she trips along in gladness
All her joy in song outrippling:

O blue bells sweet, why do ye ring?
Hath aught from life departed?
Or were ye witness in the wood
Where two met loving-hearted?

Or know ye where on lonely paths
My steps and mind go straying?
I do not hear your chimes, O bells,
But tuneful is your swaying.

Ring out the tale to listening leaves,
Ring out like angels' voices,
Till every blade and shrub and tree
In my great bliss rejoices!

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Through all the world the widest search
None happier can discover!
My heart is full of joy, blue bells,
I love and have a lover!

Dawn had scarce dispelled the darkness
When the falconer and Ludolf
Crossed the drawbridge for the forest,
There to seek the kingly crown stag;
Each to search alone till noontide,
Then to meet beside a brooklet.
As the sun rose to mid-heaven,
Gerhard neared the rough-hewn turnstile,
And within the peaceful shadows
Sat him on a mossy boulder
To await his comrade's coming.
"Young men better fare than old men
In the chase as in the wooing;"
Grumbled he, "but little found I;
None of more than fourteen branches:
That close stepper nigh the cross-path
Was no quarry for the master."
Then his hand delved down the timeworn
Hunting pouch that held his breakfast.
As he cut his meat and piecemeal
Stuck and raised it on his knife-point,
On his face, well bronzed and bearded,
Soon there beamed content and pleasure.
Nodding head and clumsy gestures,

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With a "Humph" and "Ha" low spoken,
Marked his shifting thoughts and musings.
Bright small eyes, alert and watchful,
Glanced good-naturedly about him;
Round them played the tiny wrinkles
That men jestingly call "crowfeet";
And beneath his buckskin jerkin—
Smoother far from length of service
Than his hands of barklike roughness—
Beat a heart to duty faithful,
Tender, pitying, but fearless.
Suddenly he stopped to listen
With a gobbet on his knife-point.
"Ho, there! Rough Tail, little rascal!
Well wouldst thou adorn my griddle!"
Laughed he, looking up the beech tree,
Where the leaves splashed, as a squirrel
Sprang from branch to branch unfrightened.
Sitting up within the shadow
Of his bushy tail, Sir Bright Eyes
Showed the white beneath his belly;
Then with lightning speed he scampered
In alarm along the branches.
Gerhard quickly turned to listen,
And heard Ludolf's footsteps rustling
Through the leaves, that dry and withered
Litter all the woodland hollows.
Gerhard, as he saw him coming
Through the light gray stems of beeches,

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Called to him in hunter's parlance:
"*Ho-ho! good hunter, what since dawn*
Hast thou from its cover drawn?"
Ludolf readily gave answer:
"*Ho-ho! dear hunter, the signs are clear,*
A boar with tusks, a chase-worthy deer;
Ho-ho! that fills the heart with cheer."
Sitting down beside the falconer,
He described to him minutely
All the sundry signs and traces
He 'd discovered in his searching;
Spoke of deer *returns* and *changes*,
Of their *harbor*, *runways*, *lodges*,
What their *slot* had indicated;
How a crown stag had with antlers
Bruised and twisted leaves and branches;
Of the two and seventy tokens
Known to hunters skilled in wood-craft,
He of this and that made mention,
Pointing to the game's near presence.
'T was, in short, by measure proven,
That the stag, whose trail he 'd followed,
Had full two and twenty branches.
Well content, the waggish falconer
Asked again in huntsman's jargon:
"*Hunter, canst thou tell me true,*
What is whiter than the snow,
And is blacker than the crow,
Greener than the pine is clad,

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Shrewder than the hunter's lad?"
Ludolf paused, but soon retorted:
"Day is whiter than the snow;
Night is blacker than the crow;
Hope the freshest green can show;
And a bonnie lass is ever
Than a hunter's lad more clever."
And he thereupon made ready
To return within the forest.
"Whither go'st thou?" Gerhard asked him.
"To the fox trap that I baited."
"Go then! Leave with 'Huntsman Hail';
May God's help thee never fail!"
Ludolf in return saluted:
"Dear hunter, thee I too bid 'Hail';
God's blessing with us both prevail."
Well upon his errand started,
Gerhard's jesting words o'ertook him:
"Hear my warning, brave young master,
And avoid all aged women;
For ill luck they bring the hunter."
"I 'll take heed," he laughed in answer.
"Oh, a deer with twenty branches,
And a damsel sweet and comely,
Set the hunter's heart to beating,"
To himself the old man mumbled.

Ludolf hastened through the forest
Till he reached the baited fox trap.

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Still it stood as he had set it,
But he eyed it with suspicion.
"Zounds, what 's this!" he cried in wonder,
"There 's no doubt the bait was nibbled;
Here of blood I see a driblet,
And a flock of fur—a fox's!
Who has dared to meddle with it—
Dared to free what here was captured,
Then reset the trap so poorly?
That was never done by huntsman!"
Wondering still, he hears distinctly
Sounds like faintly smothered laughter.
And behold! but little distant
From behind a giant beech tree,
Peers a roguish face half-hidden.
"Waldtraut! Thou! Thou art the culprit!"
And he makes a bound to reach her;
But she springs with squirrel swiftness
Round the beech, her merry laughter
Deep within the forest ringing.
Oft in vain he tries to catch her,
But the wary maid escapes him.
Long they thus chase one another,
Circling round among the beech trees
Till the cheeks of both are glowing.
But at last he overtakes her,
And her breathless mouth oft kisses;
Both her arms around him twining,
Heartily, with forest freshness,

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She returns his fond caresses.
"Now deliver up my captive,
Or be one thyself!" he banters.
"Oh, the fox sends thee his greeting;
Look! he ran round yonder hillock.
Haste! Make haste! Thou still mayst catch
him!"
"What! Thou gav'st the fox his freedom!"
He exclaims in feigned displeasure,
"Tell me how to punish fitly
Such a rogue and good-for-nothing!"
"Dost thou think I 'd leave in peril
Any of my woodland brethren?
They would come in hosts to aid me,
If I were beset by danger."
"This time, then, thou 'lt be forgiven,
But be sure that in the future
I shall keep the trap well hidden."

Happily they sauntered onward.
Golden sunbeams, downward streaming,
Played along their quiet pathway,
Standing out athwart the twilight
Like the gilded stripe that crosses
Field of dark upon a scutcheon.
In the mellow rays there hovered
Myriads of motes and atoms,
And a host of gleaming insects,
With their shining wings and armor,

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Humming, buzzing, up and downward.
Suddenly, as if in concert,
Motionless they 'd pause, suspended
In the air, afloat and lifeless,
Till they darted quickly sidewise
As an alien kind approached them.
Round the silvery trunks of beeches
Fitful, changing lights were flitting,
And so lucent and transparent
Shone the verdant, sap-filled leaflets,
That the tiny veins, outbranching,
Could be traced in their minuteness.
In the mosses' own dense forest,
On the blades and slender stalk-masts,
Through the twisted, curly lichens,
Climbed and straggled horny beetles,
Brilliant in their bronze and steel-blue.
As if drunk with air and sunlight,
Reeled gay butterflies, and staggered
From one chalice to another,
Fluttering on from flower to flower,
Till o'ercome by leaden fragrance,
High they joined their wings for slumber.
Grains of sand and gravel glistened
Where the glaring sunbeams shimmered
On the bare and barren patches,
And upon the boulders sparkled
Crystal quartz and silver mica.
In the sunshine basked a lizard.

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Lone a spinner crossed the pathway
Hobbling on his giddy stilt-legs.
Through the wood reigned deepest silence.
'T was the restful hour of noontide,
And a golden glimmer wavered
Through the air, serene and breathless.
Straying sounds at times came floating
As if from some boundless distance.
Game of every kind had vanished
And the thousand birds were songless,
Drowsing in the upper branches.
Every eyelid drooped in languor,
Save alone the love-awakened.

'Neath a shading giant oak tree
Ludolf and his loved one rested.
Couched upon the yielding mosses,
Waldtraut's head and straying tresses
In her lover's arms lay pillowed.
With her eyes so blue and tender
She looked up to him confiding,
As a child looks from its cradle,
While she loosened from her bodice
Sprays of flowers, which she fastened
On the hunter's leathern jerkin.
Steadfast gazed he down upon her,
Deep into her eyes and deeper;
And he looked with love and longing
On her swelling lips of crimson,

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That allured him by their beauty
Like to full-blown, fragrant roses.
Truly these were magic roses,
Charming him to sip their sweetness.
Yet no thunder clap resounded
To transform his forest princess
Into legend's grewsome monster.
Still he saw her sweet and gentle.
Now a lady-bird flew toward her,
Spotted black and red, alighting
On her hand; she gaily asked him:
"Canst thou tell of this the import?
Wedding gloves foretells the beetle
For the hand on which it settles."
Crawling o'er her palm the insect
Fell by chance into its hollow,
Lying there without a motion.
Straight upon its feet she turned it.
"Wait!" said Ludolf, "watch it struggle!
See if it gets up unaided."
"Fie!" chid Waldtraut, "let it struggle?
Giving aid to any creature
As it lies in pain or helpless
Is for seven sins remission."
"Seven sins!" said Ludolf, laughing,
"Tell me of a sin, my sweetheart,
That bears heavy on thy conscience."
"I am sinning now," she answered,
"By such waste of time in chatting.

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Look! The sun! 'T is past the midday,
And I must no longer loiter,
For to-day my aged grandam
From the valley comes to see us."
They arose and strolled together,
Hand in hand amid the stillness.
When at last they neared the coal-kiln,
And the smoke above the tree tops
Warned them that their tryst was ended,—
There, as from the ground arisen,
Collier Volrat stood and faced them!
Gloomy was his sooty visage,
Large and powerful his figure,
Strong of bone in limb and body.
Waldtraut started, sorely frightened,
And withdrew her hand from Ludolf's.
But the angry collier shouted:
"What dost thou beside my daughter?
Let me meet ye so together
Once again, and both shall rue it!"
"Master Volrat, there 's no danger
For thy child with my protection.
God knows I speak true!" said Ludolf.
"I will look to her protection!"
Roared the collier, "and I warn you,
Hunters all, to keep your distance!"
Calmly spoke the sturdy huntsman:
"Let me give thee well-meant counsel:
Let me warn thee of my master,

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Who is tracking down the poacher
That goes hunting in his forest.
He has sworn to kill the culprit."
Volrat winced, and then he answered,
With a laugh both wild and scornful:
"Save thy precious wisdom, milksop!
Let the Count himself, thy master,
Bring no further hardship on us,
Or the peasant soon will settle,
By the right of might, his grudges
Long laid up against the barons.
If he waits until the League Shoe
Raises through the Hartz its banner,
He will rue his stubborn blindness!"
Turning quickly to his daughter,
He commanded her to leave them.
Trembling stood the downcast maiden,
While hot tears betrayed her anguish,
And her eyes in silent sorrow
Sought the steadfast eyes of Ludolf.
Low she wept as she departed.

Heavy hearted yet not hopeless,
Ludolf took the homeward pathway.
Gloomy thoughts now darkly flitted
Through his mind, and deep he pondered
How to win the trust and favor
Of the wrathful sullen collier;
How to stay the deadly peril

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That now threatened Waldtraut's father;
How he, too, although forbidden,
Might still meet his forest sweetheart.
All of this with hoping, dreading,
Forming plans but to reject them,
Weighed he in his heart's depression,
Scarcely minding where he wandered,
When an old, decrepit woman,
Pacing slow, came limping toward him.
"Ill my luck! There comes the evil!
'T is the hag of Gerhard's warning!"
As the two drew near each other,
In the path she paused and waited.
Bending low beneath the burden
Of the many years she carried,
On a crutch she feebly rested,
Looking up at him intently.
From her withered, sallow visage,
Furrowed by a thousand wrinkles,
Peered a pair of eyes resembling
Those of owls,—large, gray, and glowing.
Ludolf thought to pass in silence,
But she hailed him with the greeting:
"May God bless thee, fair young hunter!"
"Bless thee also," muttered Ludolf.
"Canst thou tarry but a little?
Let me scan thy face, I beg thee;
There 's a line that I have noted
'Twixt thy brows, of special promise.

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Tell me, 'neath what constellation
Wast thou born, my good young huntsman?"
"What is that to thee?" growled Ludolf.
"Be not vexed with me, I pray thee!
Dost not know me? I am Aulke;
Dost not know old Mother Aulke?
Show thy hand that I may read it.
No—the right one. Why, God bless thee!
My own grandchild has such markings!
Strange that thine should be like Waldtraut's!
Thou art startled; did my fingers
Hurt thee? They are hard and bony."
Ludolf shook his head bewildered,
Smiling like a bashful maiden.
Then her every word he heeded;
And she spoke, while closely scanning
All the palm lines of the hunter:
"Widely branches out the head-line
Round the thumb, and great its power;
So, the Sun-line, line of honor,
Is distinct upon the table.
There 's a well formed Cave of Martin;
Deep and safe 's the Venus Girdle;
But the Mount of Saturn warns thee.
Dost thou care to know, young huntsman,
What concerns thy fate and fortune?"
Ludolf eagerly assented.

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"Many years of life are promised;
To thy name will much be added;
But the best of all the prizes
Is the one that love will grant thee.
Well-a-day! A sign here tells me
With my very kith and kindred
Thou wilt come in closer union.
But a line here points to bloodshed;
Danger, too, thou wilt encounter;
Shouldst thou pass it, then will follow
Other hardships; angry quarrels,
Flames and smoke and murder see I;
Though thou dost not cause, nor bring them,
Nor without thee could they happen.
But no more, for often knowledge
Brings us pain and hastens evil."
"Nay, but tell me, Mother Volrat,"
Now begged Ludolf, "I will pay thee,
And will ever be beholden."
"No, my lad! I take no money;
I want neither thanks nor payment,
But we 'll meet again and often."
Then she turned and hobbled onward.
Ludolf, deeply stirred, departed,
Pondering long, and ever seeing
Waldtraut in the midst of danger.
And he vowed within his bosom
With his utmost strength to shield her.
But as oft as he glanced backward,

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He saw Mother Aulke standing,
Looking round at him and nodding,
Speaking and with gestures beckoning,
Though her words he heard no longer.

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V

The Stag Hunt

YE sleepers, awaken!
The mist veil ascends,
The East with an ocean
Of fire now blends.
High mountain crests glisten
First kissed by a ray;
The songsters make ready
To hail the new day.

Come on, ye good comrades,
And follow the trail!
The fragrance of blossoms
Fills upland and dale.
A draught that refreshes,
Then hie to the wood!
The life of the hunter
Is joyful and good!

Thus from the Bergfried's turret chamber
The warder greets the dawn of day,

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And with the merry song commingles
The starling's pipe, the lark's sweet lay.
Aurora's rosy blushes mantle
The massive moss-clad walls of stone,
And on each casement's sparkling mirror
A flood of glowing flame is thrown.
With break of day the chase companions
Slip on their hunting garb with speed,
Attend to hounds and groom the horses,
And choose the weapons for their need.
The serving men and maids all hasten,
And help Agnete to prepare
Meet viands for the saddle pouches,
And flagons safe in wickerware.
Wulfhilde rises from her pillow
As dawn dispels the mists below;
A cooling bath once more refreshes
Her youthful body's rosy glow.
The Count, by his impatience tortured,
Oft scanned the East with restless gaze;
The night half-sped still found him wakeful,
Or captive in a dream-spun maze.
In vain he strove to gain a hillside,
But all his efforts went amiss;
Then with a rush the stallion bore him
Far down a yawning precipice.
A wounded bear did next pursue him.
He blew his horn; it gave no sound;
And springing up, chagrined and rueful,

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Instead of dawn, dense darkness found.
Again he dreamed: To stab a roebuck
He 'd thrown himself upon his knee,
When suddenly he wide awakened,
To hear his own loud ha-la-li.
He flings the ponderous casement open
To cool his temples in the breeze:
"A hunter free, O Wind, thou roamest,
While I, enthralled, find no release!"
Then listens—in its wonted channel
Naught but the murmuring stream he hears;
Against his cheek his bow he presses,
Yet stays his hand till day appears.
"Will morning ne'er this darkness vanquish?
O, Night! I curse thy snail-like pace!
'T is light I want! Light! light to hunt by,
As long as there 's a deer to chase!"
In vain he rails and chafes impatient,
The light no faster speeds through space.
Till lo! The pines, high on the summits,
Behold the sun's effulgent face.
Then sings the warder from the tower,
And hard upon his song of morn
The Knight hears stamping on the cobbles;
Enticing blares the bugle horn.
He soon descends, and to the greetings
Of "Huntsman Hail!" gives like replies,
Around the court casts searching glances,
And as his daughter he espies,

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Her brow with tenderness he kisses,
  Then hastens to his neighing steed—
A horse unmatched in all creation,
  In either form, or strength or speed.
His swelling veins seem almost bursting;
  With dauntless mettle gleams his eye,
As if upborne by hidden pinions,
  He 'd with the soaring storm king vie.
The Count leaps lightly to the saddle,
  When rearing, pitching, whirling round,
Wunsch dashes off in mad endeavor
  To hurl his rider to the ground.
The Count betrays no agitation,
  And, statue-like, unmoved appears;
His heart amid ordeal and danger
  Beats ever calm, devoid of fears.
And snorting, plunging, wildly leaping
  The steed careers, on freedom bent,
Till, conscious he has found his master,
  Subdued he stands, his fury spent.

Now for the wood! His eager escort
  The Knight with buoyant heart leads on—
Young Albrecht at the side of Wulfhild';
  The others follow, one by one,
Save Ludolf, who beneath the starlight
  To trace the stag had gone ahead;
For him and Telie, with his kennel,
  Two horses by the rein are led.

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"Away! Away! The Chase, ye Hunters!"
With but one thought all hearts beat high;
Dew sparkles in the morning sunshine,
And hunter's joy in every eye.
The signs they follow in the forest
That Ludolf marked from place to place
By broken twigs and twisted saplings,
So they with ease their course can trace.
Their ride is long, and oft they signal
With bugle and loud hunting cry;
They listen for response from Ludolf,
But wait in vain for his reply.
At last they hear, like chimes far distant,
Hour-var-i! faintly from a horn;
The pack with yelps the signal answers;
All with a rush are onward borne.
They ride as if for pending wager;
"Ho-Ho! Ty-o-ho! Come on!" they cheer,
Through copse and fen, till Ludolf hails them,
With Telie bringing up the rear.
"A merry chase thy horn hath led us,"
The Count exclaims, "nor did we lag."
"Alas! Sir Count, your haste was needless;
Loud noises frightened off the stag;
The peasants marched across the forest
With song and banners in their train
To sacred service in the convent,
And thus my efforts all were vain.

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For this which drove him to his covert,
The Walkenriedens are to blame;
He will return as shadows lengthen;
I 've marked where we can bag the game."
"Ye monks, descendants of the devil,
Who are forever in my way,
I 'll settle with ye, saintly villains—
And soon ye'll need to fast and pray!"
Thus fumes the Count, then gives the order:
"Take off the saddles while we wait;
Spread out the luncheon; pass the tankards;
We 'll camp here, since we stay till late!"
The steeds are left to graze contented,
Accustomed in the wood to roam;
The men stretch out upon the greensward
And rest within their forest home.

Here tarry they, attack their luncheon,
And pass the flowing beakers round;
To while away the hour more swiftly
Hilarious songs and jokes resound.
They see whilst their repast enjoying
A wandering student drawing near.
"Behold!" the Count calls out, "an offspring
Of that detested tribe comes here!
Whence hail'st thou in thy dusty tatters,
Whom naught can e'er with toil acquaint?
Thy face suffices to condemn thee;
Pray, whom avowest thou thy saint?"

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Thus rudely he accosts the vagrant,
  Who stops and keenly glances round,
Reflecting: "Gad! but he 's a sharp one;
  Methinks I 've stepped on slippery ground!"
Then speaks: "My sail is ever hoisted;
  My monastery 's all the world;
The rules that bind me—song and frolic,
  And 'neath each tree my tent 's unfurled."
"Good!" laughs the Count, "a lucky meeting!
  The while we lounge here on the grass,
Invoke for us a hunter's blessing,
  And read to us a hunter's mass.
But mind, the mass must not be tedious!
  No huntsman is repentant long;
His sins are very soon forgotten;
  He loves the chase, good cheer and song."
The willing rover answers: "*Fiat!*"
  No longer timid in his speech.
"But pardon! Long has been my journey,
  And I must drink ere I can preach."
Then at a single draught he empties
  The brimming tankard's foaming store,
And nimbly leaps upon a boulder—
  Fit pulpit for such orator.
Now to the listening congregation
  Delivers he a sermon, spiced
With bits of macaronic Latin,
  Impromptu, duly emphasized:

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"*Salvete, fratres in Sancto Huberto!*
Open your ears now, *credite experto!*
O, ye huntsmen on the ground,
As I the Gospel's truth expound,
Behold in me an *apostolum*
Who is amid you heathen sent,
To oust the *malum diabolum;*—
The hunting devil here is meant,—
Who, burr-like, ever to you clings,
As to a tree the parasite,
And to each soul destruction brings,
Whence peace forever takes its flight.
I come here timely to admonish,
Ere in his wrath the Lord shall punish.
But in sooth I am perplexed
Where to find a fitting text,
Hence must I *ad exercitium nostrum*
Preach according to my *rostrum.*
I need not ask you what your *credo,*
O, miserere! potius abscedo.
You believe that hare and deer
Live to die by bow and spear;
They appear upon the table
As the wolf did in the fable.
Cease your slaughter and offence!
Make an honest living hence!
To perdition leads each vice,
Such as swearing, drink and dice.
Et dum noseblosse blohardum trumpum,

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Tollunt laetissime kannem et bumpum.
Quartum semper excipit quintus
Ad infinitum dum nihil est intus;
Revile and vex *ecclesiam scissam,*
And never come *ad sanctam missam—*
To holy church make no concession,
No offering and no confession.
And ye ignore the convent's claim
To share in every kind of game;
Heads of boar and sides of deer
We 'd accept with thanks sincere.
Is it that ye doubt and question
If it 's well for our digestion?
Sad mistake! *Errare humanum!*
Non nocet ecclessiae donum profanum.
Huntsmen, *vulgo venatores,*
Habent amores plus quam mores.
Toward the maids ye ill behave,
And no rosy lips are safe;
Libido, favor et osculum
Ye deem all a *flosculum.*
Next I single out the wrong
Of a flippant, reckless tongue.
Ye with hardened conscience glory
In the biggest hunting story.
With one shaft ten ducks ye scored,
Tied three bears with single cord;
Maids, who for you pine and linger,
Ye claim one for every finger.

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And again ere deep ye sink,
Shun the *diabolum* drink.
If there 's urgent thirst to quench
Sit not singly on the bench;
Seek ye one with whom to sip
Who will aid good fellowship,
Take, I say, a spiritual man
To ban the spirit in the can.
Hence, if there comes a pious *pater*,
Or, perchance, a younger *frater*,
Or, belike, a wandering student,
Good treatment is but just and prudent,
And with such a pious crew,
An extra cup no harm will do;
As ye befriend the Lord's ordained,
Reward eternal will be gained.
The service must not be too long.
Amen! We 'll finish with a song."
But ere a single note he uttered,
The Count spoke out with hearty will:
"Now should 'st thou have an intermission,
And from this tankard drink thy fill.
Thou hast berated us severely,
But I will graciously forbear—
'T is clear to me thou art no hunter,
Yet share with us our hunter's fare.
Thy throat must sadly need a moistening;
Come, Brother Bunghole, dine thou first,
For there are left thee ample remnants,

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And wine to quench thy boundless thirst."
There was no need of further urging
One never known the cup to slight;
He drank and drank and stroked his belly,
And stowed away with all his might.
But when at last the glutton halted,
Unused to this abundant fare,
He could suppress his glee no longer.
With eyes that sparkled sat he there,
A happy and contented toper;
And, kindled by an impulse strong,
He raised again his wine-filled goblet,
And lustily began his song:

The worst I know of earthly strife
Is that it ends too soon;
Had I a thousand years of life
I'd call the cup a boon.
Though loud the cock crew in the morn,
Fast to the bench I'd cling;
And hence, I vow, I'd not be torn—
But drum, and thump, and sing:
Gling! Glang! Gloria!
Potori est victoria!
Then let the clinking mugs resound
The while they make their reeling round!

The world's a puzzling place to me,
In truth I must opine—

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But what of that, since I am free
And young with ancient wine!
The comrade true, the buxom maid,
The fullest bowl I'll claim,—
And of my conscience unafraid,
Make joyous life my aim:
Gling! Glang! Gloria!
Potori est victoria!
Then let the clinking mugs resound
The while they make their reeling round!

The very last sip and the very last kiss
May bring me to a halt;
Till then, methinks, 't is not amiss
The flagon to exalt.
As each good man his portion sups,
Let 'neath the welkin ring
The rattling, battling din of cups,
As revelling we sing:
Gling! Glang! Gloria!
Potori est victoria!
Then let the clinking mugs resound
The while they make their reeling round!

Then he arose his thanks to render,
And as he left in merry mood,
Strode briskly on without a stumble
Till he had vanished in the wood.

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The hours have sped, and now the hunters
  Bestride their saddled steeds again;
They swiftly ride along in silence
  Through shady woodland, brake and glen.
Soon they espy the telltale footprints
  That serve them as a trusty guide;
Then on the eager huntsmen gallop,
  Now firmly seated for the ride.
The straining hounds are freed from leashes,
  And set at once upon the track;
They scent and follow quick the traces;
  Wild through the thicket sweeps the pack.
Fast after them the riders hasten,
  And joyful beats the hunter's heart;
Each casts about to sight the quarry,
  And to the right and left they part.
"Ho-ho! ho-ho! There! There he's flying!"
  The archer cries, "Give chase! Here! Here!
Ahead! Ahead! On! On! Pursue him!
  Hal-loo! Hal-loo! The noble deer!"
He guides them with his sharp, shrill signals;
  Responses come from far and near;
The sound of horns and hunters cheering
  Throughout the wood rings in the ear,
And tempest-like they all dash forward
  Impetuous, o'er the trackless course;
The forest lists, the air is trembling,
  Both spur and thorn goad on the horse.

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Proud flies the deer, a forest monarch,
His antlered crown he stretches back;
Twigs creak and snap, and branches rustle
As foemen crowd upon his track.
Here bugles call, there shouts and voices:
"Hal-loo! The deer! The deer!" resounds
Amid the tramp of speeding coursers
And ever louder bay the hounds.
Into the wood at frantic gallop,
The steeds they madly onward urge,
Without a halt, through copse and thicket,
Mid shrubs that like green billows surge.
Now vanishes beneath the branches
A single horseman pressing on;
Another darts o'er bright lit meadows,
His weapon glittering in the sun.
They crash through sturdy hazel bushes,
And through a hedge their horses tear;
Their colors glint and their locks wave wildly,
Affrighted scamper doe and hare.

Astride of a spirited chestnut is Albrecht;
Wulfhilde, on Redcheek, soars well in the lead;
Ahead of them all, for a hazard or venture,
Count Hackelber'nd fleets on his furious steed.
The horses, though dripping, continue the struggle;

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With baying and yelping on follows each hound.
Shy flutter the birds; the tree tops all quiver;
The flowers and grasses bow low to the ground.
Hot rages the race across gullies and boulders;
Where is he? Where is he? The deer? Ho-ho!
A hairbreadth oft saves them from trees in their courses;
He 's coming! He 's coming! Hal-lo! Hal-lo!
Their cheeks are aglow and their hearts are fast throbbing,
Hal-lo! Hal-lo! Seek! Seek! Giff-gaff!
Their eyes flashing fire, hot faces perspiring,
Tra-ra! Tra-ra! Hift! Hift! Cliff-claff!
The forest is whirling, trees turning and dancing;
Hu-hu! Dock! Dock! Hal-lo and Ho-ho!
With a rush and a roar they fly through vast spaces;
Dock! Dock! Lu-lu-lo! Dor-i-do! Dor-i-do!
And ever the hart fleeting on still eludes them
With branching *attire*, as if decked with a crown;
Now uphill and downhill, now hither, now thither

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They chase him; they 'll follow until he is down.
The din now is nearing, again it is distant,
With horsemen and bugles and pack in full cry;
Or sunlight, or moonlight, or starlight above them,
They see not, and care not, but wildly rush by.

No halt, no rest, no spell for breathing;
The heated rider in his speed
Takes scarcely time to ope his jerkin,
And flecked with foam is every steed.
But with the sinking sun they falter,
As slowly wanes their measured strength,
And with their panting dogs the huntsmen,
Outworn and lame, turn home at length.
Wulfhilde and her escort Albrecht
On mettled steeds still forward press,
Resolved in fealty to follow
The Count within the wilderness.
But as they ride through gathering shadows
O'er tangling vines, the young Knight calls:
"Beware thee lest thy Redcheek stumble!"
When down Wulfhilde's palfrey falls.
The horse with straining muscles rises,
Regains his feet, and turns in flight;
While Albrecht hastes to raise Wulfhilde,

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Who soon recovers from her fright.
With smiling face she leans upon him,
And little heeds her foot's dull pain.
He leads her to his empty saddle
And with his aid she mounts again.
But as he strides along beside her,
Wulfhilde urges him to ride:
"Dear cousin, if thy steed but paces
He 'll carry thee and me beside."
Then as he swings himself behind her,
And firmly of the reins takes hold,
The arms of Wulfhild'twine around him,
His face is kissed by strands of gold.
She feels his breath, and in sweet rapture
Leans softly on his knightly breast;
Her bosom heaves and she abandons
Herself to happiness and rest.
The way is long, yet both in silence
Ride slowly toward their castle home;
While secret thoughts and unshared wishes
Ascend the mystic starlit dome.

The Count speeds on with Wunsch and Willé,
And knows not that he is alone,
Or that the thundering din of horses
Has long since ceased except his own.
The golden sun of even flashes,
But he sees not the world ablaze;
He feels not that the thorn has scratched him,

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Or that the branches beat his face.
Dank vapors rise and darkness gathers;
The night o'er all its mantle throws;
He heeds it not, while hotly hammers
The blood that through his temples flows.
The glimmering moon ascends the heavens
And floats above a silvery fleece;
The Knight beholds it not, but eager
Upon pursuit, will know no peace
Until he takes this prize before him,—
The proudly antlered, royal game,—
For this he soul and body hazards,
And this has set his heart aflame.
He presses on close by the convent;
The chapel windows, arched and long,
Are brightly lit, and through the stillness
Float cadences of sacred song.
Then in a pause between responses
The Count blows from his bugle-horn
Shrill fanfares toward the sanctuary
To flaunt defiance and his scorn.
He laughs and scoffs: "Bald-pated villains,
Who prate of punishment in Hell,
Now know ye how Hans Hackelberend
Regards the limit of your bell!"
Once more, unpitying, he presses
His spur into the stallion's side,
Once more into the forest charges,
Without a sign or light to guide;

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And Willé howls along in fury,
As on their desperate way they go;
And while the Count cries "On!" and urges:
"Wunsch! Willé! Seek! Hal-lo! Hal-lo!"
Like tempest roars and onward rushes
The maddening chase through wood and brake,
As if the rocks had burst asunder
And thunder followed in their wake.
When suddenly the steed, affrighted,
Cuts short the reckless, frantic ride.
He rears and plunges, backward bracing,
Refusing to advance a stride;
He snorts and stamps, his body trembling,
Then crouching low, he will not move;
His eyes protrude; his nostrils quiver,
And spur and urging useless prove.
The Count dismounts, and Willé cowers,
His fearless courage all forgot;
Both he and Wunsch, as if by magic,
Seem fixed to this mysterious spot.
Adown the slope rise forest giants,
And boulders huge and mossy hang;
Beyond, spreads out a boggy meadow
Where ne'er a peasant's sickle rang.
There! There it comes! A swelling crescent,
Through moonlight and the mists of eve!
Has 't flesh and blood, this surging current?
Or can the mind such phantoms weave?

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It lives and stirs with ghostly motion,
Like human bodies, rows of dead
From grave arisen, horror-shapen!—
The Count stands dazed and numb with dread.
Then cold the sweat starts on his forehead;
He cannot flee nor move a limb;
The weight of mountains is upon him,
While they draw near and nearer him.
His heart at last regains its valor;
He gazes at the spectral train;
"The Woden Host!" he faintly mutters,
And leans on Wunsch support to gain.

With staff in hand old faithful Warner
Benignly, gravely leads the van,
Who has full knowledge of the future
And knows each secret wish of man.
He slowly nods his head, and sadly
Upon the Count directs his eye;
And with a solemn incantation
He points his staff up toward the sky.
Next comes in majesty and grandeur
A Form upon a noble steed;
He follows close behind the leader,
And to the Knight pays little heed;
While round and round about his charger
The two gray wolves trot, lean and grim,
And o'er his head the pair of ravens

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Again in flight encircle him;
Beside him rides his godlike consort,
Who in her hand the distaff holds;
Along the palfrey's side float trailing
Her garment's snowy, glistening folds.
Then follow men of giant stature
In skins of bison and of bear,
With heads of horned wild beasts for helmets,
'Neath which rough-bearded faces stare.
Next mounted huntsmen come in squadrons,
And hordes with arms of ancient mould;
But in their veins no life-blood courses,
Nor breathe they. All are stark and cold.
And in the long, extended column
That stretches out across the dale,
Are lovely women high on horses,
Whose beauty naught but night mists veil.
They gently nod and beckon sadly
With long and white and languid hands;
And with a face as pale and dreary
The moon peers o'er the spectral bands.
Thus floats along the weird procession:
From hoof, from sword, from shield no sound;
All mute and silent; songless, toneless—
A nether world above the ground.
The mist that shrouds the ghostly faces
Dissolves, and rends the filmy veil;
Like fluttering locks or mantles swaying,

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Its shimmering skirts, low surging, trail.
Distinctly now appear the figures
As through a cloud-rift in a dream;
Now, as in gauzes thin enfolded,
Uncertain, dim and vague they seem.
And slowly passing through the woodland
This pageant from the shades of death,
From darkness comes, to darkness gathers,
And fades away like mortal breath.

The Count stands dazed as he were blinded,
Yet long has passed the dismal train;
He does not mount, but homeward turning,
Leads on the stallion by the rein.
The soul that never bent or yielded
Is now the prey of nameless dread;
The demon fear his throat is clutching,
Wild terror crouches o'er his head.
For he has seen great Woden muster
His levies from the spirit land;
To him the midnight horde has beckoned:
His day of death is near at hand.
The Judge on High has sent His warning,—
The Lord at whom he oft has jeered;—
Now, but to pray for one short moment,
And, ere he dies, of sin be cleared!
Ah, look! Beneath yon branching linden,
High on the rock-strewn mountain side,
Stands out distinctly in the moonlight,

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A cross that bears the Crucified.
The carven image of the Savior,
With arms and hands extended wide,
There offers him eternal mercy,
And he surrenders all his pride.
And here, alone with Wunsch and Willé,
Who in his many sins had shared,
It seemed within the forest stillness
An inner voice to him declared:
"Before the sorrowing Redeemer,
Who, sinless, suffering for us died,
Bow down thy heart, and clear thy conscience,
And mercy will not be denied."
Then to the cross without a witness,
With head uncovered, staggers he;
His soul repentant craves salvation,
And he will bend his stubborn knee.
But, hark! Afar he hears the tolling,
Now full and deep, of convent bells.
"What!" cries he, "You! You mean to force me
To penance, as your letter tells?
No! No! I will not kneel before thee,
Thou make-believe of wood and paint!
Thou fellow of yon spectral vision!
With ghosts of eld goes mythic saint,
And though the millions come to worship,
I, all alone, oppose thee here;
Yea! Challenge thee to mortal combat,

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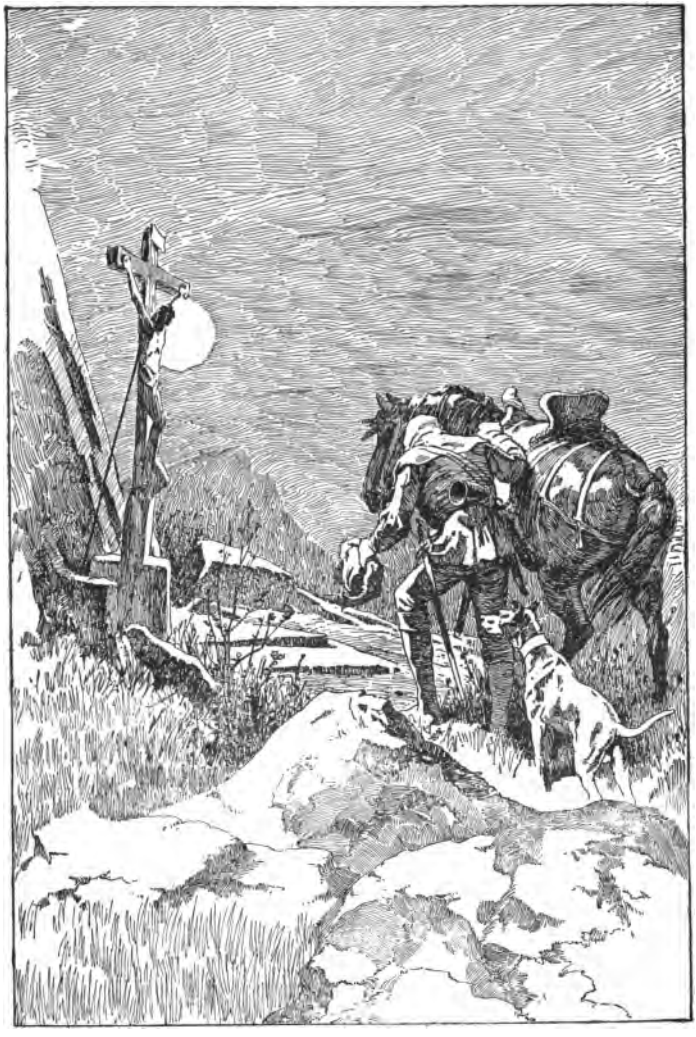

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For of thy strength I have no fear!
'T is said that shooting at thy image
The archer's bow and arrow charms,
And, lest a deer again escape me,
My mark be thou, with outstretched arms!
This very day of Corpus Christi
I 'll prove to thee my long felt scorn,
And thy descent from cross I 'll hasten
With my good shaft, thou mortal born!"
He quickly grasps and bends his crossbow
To do the deed thus rashly planned,
But Wunsch rubs gently 'gainst his shoulder,
And Willé warmly licks his hand.
"Ah! Would ye faithful friends thus warn me?
Or are ye with them in a league?"
He pats the horse and fondles Willé—
"No! No! Ye are above intrigue!"
And in the moonlight there beside them,
He lifts his voice: "Christ Jesus, tell
If through thy death and guiltless suffering
Thou savest man from lasting Hell?
Is there, forsooth, a life hereafter—
A Heaven of eternal bliss?
Or, taught by falsehood and invention,
Are hope and fear alike amiss?
O, give a token! Beckon to me!
Wilt pardon grant if I repent?
Withhold not! Save me, now or never!
I am upon thy answer bent!"

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And while he lists, on dying breezes,
That play about his fevered brow,
There floats a bell's slow, mournful cadence—
"The monk's reply! O, cursed be thou,
With whom hypocrisy and priestcraft
Go hand in hand throughout the world!
Thou idol! Scarecrow! By my arrow
Be thou from thy high station hurled!"
He snatches from his back the weapon;
Puts on a shaft and bends the bow;
That instant, by his voice affrighted,
Before his eyes there runs a doe.
He sees it not, but hears the bell toll;
Unswerving he takes steady aim—
The shaft strikes sharp and shrill the timber,
And shivers through the Savior's frame.
The Count his bosom clutches quickly;
He feels a sudden, stinging pain;
A moment full of mortal anguish—
The convent bell is mute again.

A storm roars from the mountain summits,
And deafening thunder claps resound—
His body shattered into pieces
The Son of God lies on the ground.
The Count no longer thinks of dying,
The gain of Heaven, or its loss;
Firm in the stirrup turns he homeward
And leaves his arrow in the cross.

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VI

The Next Shot

IN the morn the castle servants
Were, as wont, within the gate tower
For their early draught assembled.
One and all, the hunters, wardens,
Dame Agnete and the women
Sat around the oaken table.
But instead of chat and banter
That lent cheer to all their gatherings,
Now a doleful silence brooded,
For their thoughts dwelt on the stag hunt,
And its fruitless, unknown ending.
Dame Agnete first gave vent to
Her ill humor: " 'T is no wonder
That the two and twenty antlers
Yesterday slipped through your fingers;
Badly lamed and jaded horses
Is what comes of sinful hunting
On the holy Corpus Christi!
Elsbeth, tell me," she continued,
"How 's the foot of thy young mistress?"

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"Oh, the foot is least! I 'm certain
She has lain the whole night sleepless,
For her eyes are red with weeping,
And she looks so wan and wretched."
"There!" exclaimed the Dame Agnete,
"Said I not I heard her sobbing,
As I passed along the hallway?"
"Fie! Thou ever listening gossip!
Woman, mend thy ways!" chid Gerhard.
"One thing I would fain unriddle,"
Quoth the groom; "what evil fortune
Has upon our master fallen?
Wunsch and Willé mope and shiver;
'T is as if the Blocksberg witches
Had flown over them at midnight."
"In the early morn," said Telie,
As I stepped into his chamber,
In his restless sleep he muttered:
"Wode! Wode! There I see them—
There they vanish in the distance!"
"Said he that? Then God have mercy!"
Cried out Gerhard sore affrighted.
"He 's the Woden Host encountered
After midnight in the forest.
He whose mortal eyes behold it
Has the powers above offended."
"But the Host moves after Yule Tide,
Ere the Twelfth Night, and no later!"
Ludolf argued. "All the greater

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Is the cause for fear!" cried Gerhard.
"Did ye lasses cease your spinning?"
Asked Agnete. "Be ye cautioned!
If at night the Wode passes,
All that turns must stop directly,
Be it spindle, cart, or mill wheel."
"Were the doors shut tightly, Wenzel?"
Anxiously inquired the falconer.
"Where in line three doors stand open,
There he has unhindered passage,
And throughout the year then follow
Only evil, strife, and sickness."
"Cite the devil, quick ye 'll have him,"
Warned Agnete; "things are going
To the bad o'er all the country;
Ask friend Wenzel if they be not!"
"Yes," said he, "while ye were hunting,
Trude's lover from the smeltery
Came and told us of the peasants,
Who in mighty hordes are coming
To lay waste, and burn and murder.
They are called *The Needy Conrad*,
And the League Shoe is the emblem
That they carry on their banners.
Thomas Muenzer is their leader,
He of Stolberg, in our mountains:
Boldly they demand that ground rent,
Interest, taxes, tithes, and tenure
At one stroke be all abolished;

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And they ask a fair partition,
Both of timber lands and pastures.
If the barons in their castles
Slight these many claims for justice—
If they scorn *The Needy Conrad*,
They will surely rue their folly.
When the Leaguers once have triumphed,
They will rouse old Barbarossa,
Sitting in Kyffhäuser Castle,
With his beard grown through the table,
That he may restore their freedom
With a charter for their warrant.
Far and wide extends the rising,
Spreading over all the Empire;
In Franconia and Alsatia,
Switzerland and on the Danube,
In Thuringia and the Brisgau
Unrestrained the rebels riot."
"Evil tidings!" grumbled Gerhard.
"See to armor, walls and weapons,
That we may defeat and hurl them
Bleeding from the castle ramparts,
When they come for contribution!"
Heeding Gerhard's timely warning,
After their repast the huntsmen
Gathered all their trusty weapons,
Looked to coats of mail and bucklers,
Sharpened spears and rusty halberds,
Split and shaped hard wood for arrows;

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While Agnete weighed and counted
All the stores within the cellars,
So they 'd lack not for subsistence
If the castle were invested.
Thus its liegemen all made ready
To avert the threatened danger.

Sitting desolate in her chamber,
With one hand her cheek supporting,
Gazed Wulfhilde down the valley,
Where the gleaming Bode rippled,
Gently here, and there in ferment
Foaming over polished pebbles.
Near, a pair of wagtails flitted,
Darting after dancing midges
For their second brood of nestlings.
But the tear-wet eyes of Wulfhild'
Heeded not what lay before them.
Often rose her sighing bosom,
While in low and broken accents
Fell from lips that sadly quivered:
"O that thou mightst cease thy beating,
Heart forlorn, with anguish stricken!
Blissful dreams have long beguiled thee;
All have vanished, flown forever.
Thou canst nevermore possess him;
For he loves thee not, and hopeless
Is thy fond desire; thy dreams were
Vain and empty; thee he loves not.

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Yestereve, when riding homeward,
I embraced him—O, the rapture!
'T was but once, one sacred moment!
Nevermore! O, full and burning
Beat my heart upon his bosom,
But his own he locked within him,
And my love was not admitted.
Even with my arms about him
Still he seemed a senseless statue,—
Cold as dew his look and word were.
Scorned my love is and rejected.
What! rejected? Never! Never
Will I bear the slight! No knight shall
Ever vaunt of this; nay, rather
Let my poor heart break—but never,
Never must he know! Away, tears!
Smile, ye eyes! And thou—be silent!"

Albrecht, too, was in his chamber,
But his face was lit with gladness.
On the table near the casement
Stood a basket with two pigeons;
Almost tenderly he watched them
While they, cooing, pecked the kernels
That he freely strewed around them.
Then indited he this letter:
"Heather Rose, my own dear sweetheart,
Both the pigeons, swiftly flying,
With thy precious written message

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Safely reached this moated castle.
One to-night shall bear my letter
Back to her whose love has blessed me.
Look forth, thou! Await its coming,
As of old did Father Noah,
From the ark, upon the mountain.
And may love's own goddess save it
From the kite's and hawk's sharp talons!
Heather Rose, thou think'st thy lover
Is at Treseburg held captive
By the eyes of his fair cousin.
Have no fear! For now, as ever,
I am thine,—thy steadfast lover.
And when in the bright-hued forest
Leaves begin to fall in autumn,
Then for home my horse I 'll saddle,
Swiftly hie to thee and linger
Through long days of joy unmeasured;
And thy dewy lips, rose-petalled,
Will with kisses bid me welcome.
Fare thee well, my Heather Rosebud,
May God's angels safely shield thee,
And their wings ward off all evil!"
Then with silken cord securely
Fastened he the folded missive
'Neath the pinion of the pigeon,
Let it fly through open casement,
Watching it afar and saying:
"Bear love's message to my sweetheart!"

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And the Count? Did he not stagger
'Neath his load of sin tremendous?
Did the solid ground sustain him
In his sacrilege so monstrous?
Night still brooded o'er the mountains
When he reached the glooming castle,
Threw himself upon his pillow,
And, exhausted, sank in slumber,
That deep-wrapped his restless spirit.
In the morning, slowly rousing,
He recalled his wild adventure
As a vague, half-dreamt illusion,
Until wakening memory startled,
And the truth dawned full upon him.
Penitent? No! Not an instant!
For the wickedness committed
Failed to rouse or prick his conscience;
What were lawless deeds but noble
In a man of dauntless mettle,
Who naught hopes, and whom naught frightens?
In the broad, clear light of morning
Vanished too the dread of phantoms;
And the only grief that vexed him
Was his failure in the stag hunt.
"Ere the night I 'll test the saying—
Know if my right arm be palsied,
And my bow and shaft enchanted
By the piercing of the image."
Thinking thus, he took his weapons,

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Ordered Bruno not to follow,
As had been the archer's custom,
And to Willé did not whistle.
All alone he sought the forest,
Roving through its endless mazes,
While he marvelled at the absence
Of all game. At last, he sighted
Up beneath the clouds an eagle,
Far beyond the flight of arrow,
And it seemed to him an omen
That the keen-eyed, royal robber
Flew above him in wide circles.
"Draw'st thou o'er my head a halo?"
Thus he jeeringly salutes him,
"'T is a span too near to Heaven!
Or know'st thou that I am given
High to bear my head, cloud-breaster?"

Silence reigned throughout the forest,
Broken only when there echoed
Song of finch and pigeon's cooing,
Yellow thrush's flutelike piping,
And the pecker's tapping hammer.
Sap-filled leaves, unstirred by breezes,
Hung on twigs as if they floated;
Gleaming lights beside dark shadows
Played amid the varied foliage;
Oak trees, vast and venerable,
Spread their huge arms in protection

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O'er their small and weaker brethren.
Broom, wild cherry, golden furzes
In luxuriance bloomed beneath them;
And around, bright flowers clustered:
Briar roses, silver thistles,
Monarch's torch and stalky foxgloves;
Tiny, tender bluebells nodded;
Graceful ferns with arching plumage
Rose above rank weeds and grasses.
As in sunlit air, the branches
Close entwined and intermingled,
So the roots, too, clung together,
Grasping hands beneath the surface,
Clasped and interlocked like fingers.
If one chanced to be uprooted,
Others often languished with it,—
All like pleasant friends in common
Of the sun and earth partaking.
Through this solitude of nature,
Fair, reposeful, peace-enwreathéd,
Stole the peaceless Hackelberend.
He felt not the sting of conscience—
It was deadened, deaf and silent—
Yet he knew no sweet contentment
In the wealth of flowering verdure
Or the symphony of bird-song.
Earth to him, with all its beauty,
Was one vast preserve for hunting.
'T was not love of gain or slaughter,

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But an eager, curbless passion
That relentlessly possessed him,
Raging through his veins incessant,
Like a steady, burning fever,
Goading him and spurring onward,
As if haunting spirits drove him;—
Turning all his wants and wishes,
All his thoughts, his dreams and musings,
Toward the chase and toward the forest.

Hours together through the woodland,
Listening, watching, roves the Huntsman,
Daunted not by many failures:
And at last—in yonder coppice
Something moves—again—draws nearer—
It is far—the game is hidden,
But a charm is on the arrow!
Sharply twangs the quivering bowstring!—
Sharp the cry of pain that answers!
No dumb brute has tone so plaintive;
That was human! Through the thicket
Hastes the Count, and there finds Waldtraut
Swooning, bleeding, 'midst the bushes,
That with gentle arms enfold her.
Pale with fear stands he, the fearless!
"Ha! Art fooled! The devil fooled thee!
With the shot that broke the image
Hell has cheated and deceived thee!"
Naught for life cares Hackelberend;

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Two alone are precious to him,
Now of these one lies in peril.
Tremblingly he bears the maiden
To the brook's cool-flowing waters;
Tenderly he kneels beside her,
And in deep-moved joy discovers
That the shaft but touched her shoulder!
Soft he bathes the wound, and binds it,
While with gentle words he soothes her,
As her wondering eyes reopen;—
Presses her with kindly urgence
To come with him to the castle,
Where Wulfhilde, like a sister,
Will watch over and attend her.
Half-alarmed, the maid refuses,
Pleading that her father, searching,
Would not rest until he found her.
But the Count, in kind rejoinder,
Soon allays her lingering scruples
By the promise of a message
To the collier in the forest.
Now his eyes, so dark and burning,
Seem to beam on her benignly,
And his ever-dreaded presence
Loses all its terror for her.
Wondrous is the strange emotion
That sweeps o'er her as she gazes
At the gloomy man beside her.
She no longer stems resistant

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This mysterious drift of feeling;
And—there 's Ludolf at the castle!
So she yields and leans adrooping
On the strong arm that supports her.
Much its wonted inmates marvelled
As the two approached the stronghold.
Who had ever seen a flower
On that close-drawn leather jerkin?
Now, behold—the Count and Waldtraut!
Kindly is the maiden's welcome—
Known to all and greatly cherished
Is this unspoiled child of nature.
Sweet Wulfhilde speeds to nurse her,
And Agnete, skilled in healing,
Hurries for her precious unguents;
While her lover's greetings mingle
With his anger, half-forgiving,
Toward the grim and rueful Huntsman,
Whose fell shot had brought her to him.
Straight the Count despatches Ludolf
With a message to the collier,
And thereafter seeks seclusion
In his lonely tower-chamber.

Sunset tinged the west as Ludolf
Turned into the well-worn pathway
From the castle to the coal-kiln,
So oft travelled lightly by him
When he sought his forest sweetheart;

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And he thought of Aulke's sayings
When she had revealed his future.
Was his loved one's wound, he wondered,
But the prelude or beginning
Of that prophecy's fulfilment,
With the worst fate still before him?
For old Aulke spoke of quarrels,
Conflagration, smoke and slaughter.
Anxious, filled with dark misgivings,
Strode he through the noiseless forest.
Suddenly from out the thicket
Collier Volrat leaped before him
With a long and heavy cudgel;
Wrath made terrible his features,
And he seemed as huge and frightful
As the Wild Man from the Hartz wood.
"Villain! Now I have thee!" cried he.
"Tell me, if thy life thou valuest,
Where hast thou my daughter hidden?"
Ludolf, first a step retreating
From the madman, calmly answered:
"I was on my way to tell thee
What at noon befell the maiden;
Now my lips are sealed with silence
Till thou bear'st thyself more gently;
Then shalt thou know fully of her."
"Darest thou defy me, fellow?"
Volrat snorted, "I 'll soon teach thee!"
As he raised his club to strike him,

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Ludolf drew his gleaming weapon,
But the collier with his cudgel
Struck it from his hand adroitly,
Seized and shook him by the collar:
"Villain, say! Where is my daughter?"
"Not for thy sake will I tell thee,"
Shouted Ludolf, gaining freedom,
"But because thou art the father
Of the maid I love in honor.
Volrat, thou dost charge me wrongly;
At the Treseburg is Waldtraut."
"Liar, thou! And worthless rascal!"
Roared the collier roused to fury.
"Were I told she 'd climbed in safety
To great Woden's Mark, I 'd sooner
Think it true, than that my daughter
Had set foot within the castle,
An no robber dragged her to it."
" 'T was the Count himself who brought her;
He by sad mischance, while hunting,
Shot and grazed her on the shoulder.
Now his daughter waits upon her,
And will soon restore her to thee."
"Lies again!" loud scoffed the savage,
"Wounded! By the Count! Thou 'rt raving!
He hits surer, game or women!
Ho, ye fellows! Come! I need ye!"
And he beckoned two stout woodmen,
Who 'd been felling trees for burning,

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And, attracted by the clamor,
Had been listening to the quarrel.
"That 's the rascal stole my daughter!"
Volrat cried, "and he refuses
To disclose her place of hiding.
Take your withes, and we will tie him
'Twixt that pair of oaken saplings!
With their help his tongue may loosen!"
In the brief unequal struggle
Ludolf soon was overpowered,
And his bonds securely fastened.
"Wilt thou tell before we leave thee?"
Asked again the irate collier.
Down the hunter's cheeks in anger
Rolled hot tears, but still he spoke not.
"Think upon it till the morrow,
If the bears and wolves at nightfall
Save thee not from further answer!"
Volrat snarled as he departed,
Followed by the stolid woodmen.

As if crucified hung Ludolf,
Helpless, lone, and at the mercy
Of all nightly prowling creatures;
Low he said a Pater Noster,
Quietly his doom awaiting.
Darkness fast succeeds dim twilight
With its phantom brood of shadows,
When he hears a sudden rustling

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In the underbrush behind him,
And his limbs begin to tremble
As with straining ears he catches
Sounds of breathless panting, scenting,
And a stealthy pit-a-patter,
Coming nearer, ever nearer—
"Ah, the wolves! Be quick, old fellows!"
Thus he mutters, "None of your kind
Have I needlessly tormented!"—
When before his eyes' dread survey
Hobbles Volrat's aged mother.
"Still! Be still!" the woman whispers,
"For I came to help, young hunter;
I looked on from yonder thicket,
But I had no power to aid thee.
Here 's my sickle! It will free thee!
Lord o' mercy! All is useless;
Up beyond my reach they 've tied thee!"
"Do but leap, or stand on tiptoe!"
Ludolf urged in his impatience;
But old Aulke stood there silent,
Shaking her gray locks in sorrow.
"'T is in vain, I cannot reach it!"
"With a pull, belike," said Ludolf,
"I may slightly bend the saplings."
"But the least bit more," urged Aulke,
"Draw them down a finch-step lower!
There, 't is done! And now the other!"
"Quick! Give me thy sickle, mother!"

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And he cut the withes asunder.
Freed again, his strained arms aching,
Ludolf flung them round old Aulke,
And in gratitude he kissed her;
Then she vanished in the bushes.

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VII

The Abbot of Walkenrieden

TWO stout monks of Walkenrieden
In the sultry heat of noontide
Strode along the forest pathway,
Briskly plying alder branches
To ward off the stinging midges
And to cool their glowing faces.
By the side of each good brother
Hung a basket rudely braided
Of the slender twigs of willow;
And within these, packed in nettle,
Many-jointed crayfish crackled,
As their bony armor grated.
Valiantly these godly fishers,
Wading slowly up the Wieda,
Had at length with booty laden
Turned them homeward to the convent.
Now they eagerly debated
How to cook their toothsome prizes.
One held they should slowly simmer,

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While the other counselled boiling;
Each then counted on his fingers
All the pros and cons, but neither
Changed the other's firm opinion,
Though they both agreed that sauces
Gave the dish its needful savor.
Then they trudged along together
For a while in perfect silence,
Broken soon by Jeremias
In a doleful tone lamenting:
"Long our carp bell has been silent;
Trout I 've had now to a surfeit."
"Verily," laughed out Jesaias,
"But for eels and parsley garnish,
Seasoned with wild sage and pepper,
We 'd be sorely tried to bear it."
"With the carp there goes a bumper
Of old Salva wine! What say'st thou?"
Asked with sparkling eyes his comrade.
Plodding on beneath the branches,
Their famed wine they were discussing,
Cask by cask throughout the cellar,
When with eyes of stricken terror
Straight they saw the barren cross-tree
And the Savior's image scattered
On the ground in many pieces.
"What is this? O God of mercies!
Do my own good eyes deceive me?
Look! Jesaias, look before thee!"

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And they stood aghast with horror,
Staring at the splintered fragments,
And upon the cross dismantled.
Jeremias broke out sharply:
"If the devil had no hand in 't,
I will vouch it was no other"—
"Than the Count Hans Hackelberend,"
Friar Jesaias quickly added,
"Look! There sticks the Count's black arrow!
Did no lightning strike the monster?
Does the Lord in His forbearance
Set no limit for the sinner?"
Then in trembling haste they gathered
All the cross's precious relics,
And sped onward to the convent.

Pressed with cares and heavy hearted
Was the reverend Abbot, Paulus,
When the fishers hurried to him
With their tale of dastard outrage.
He was brooding o'er ill tidings
Of the peasants' depredations:
Reinhardsbrunn, a sister convent,
Had been plundered by the League Shoe;
Driven forth were monks and abbot;
Wrecked were images and altars,
And the very tombs demolished
Of Thuringia's ancient Landgraves;
Torn were precious scrolls and parchments,

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And their chapel burned and pillaged.
Now the menace of the Leaguers
Shook the monks of Walkenrieden,
And, a plague in its contagion,—
So the angry Abbot named it—
Spread the Doctor Luther's teaching.
Townsmen caught it, and the peasants
In their turn became unruly;
Tithes and taxes due the convent
Were delayed and oft defaulted.
Now, alas! Count Hackelberend,
Whom in bitterness he hated,
Had with impious presumption
Hunted deer on Corpus Christi,
And disturbed their sacred vespers
With his dogs and blaring fanfares.
Last and worst, the Savior's body
He had shot in desecration.
With abhorrence and amazement
Spread the tidings in the convent,
And at once the Master Steward
Was before the Abbot summoned.

In a massive walled enclosure
Rose the many stately buildings
Of the ancient monastery.
Here were convent house and chapter,
With their spacious halls and galleries,
Dormitory, storage houses,

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Barns, refectory and kitchen,
Stables, granary and brewery,
And the chapel, standing proudly,
With its richly blazoned windows,
And its sumptuous, gilded chancel;
Here were broad and shaded cloisters,
Arched, with pillars nobly carven,
'Neath which stood in niche and angle
Many a crumbling stone-hewn image
Of illustrious knights and ladies,
Honored patrons of the convent.
Here were time-worn marble tablets
With illegible inscriptions,
Names and dates, with skull and cross-bones
Warning man: "Memento Mori."
Near the chapel, o'er the cloister,
Was the Abbot's quiet dwelling,
With the strong-barred vaults of granite;
While the cell of many a brother,
Though forbid by stringent canon,
Wanted not for homelike comforts,
Tapestries of royal weaving
Decked the Abbot's princely chambers.
Leathern-covered seats surrounded
Tables bearing precious parchments;
Inlaid cupboards, bossed and gilded,
Deep-carved chests and polished settles
Held the treasures of the chapel;
Richly wrought there lay upon them

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Golden ewers, silver sconces,
Ancient monstrances and censers,
Jewelled copes and gleaming mitres,
And a lamp of brass glowed dully,
Swinging low before Our Lady.

Paulus, nine and thirtieth Abbot
From the ancient chapter's founding,
Counting through its four long centuries,
Was a man of noble bearing,
Tall and powerful of stature;
Bold his brow and deep beneath it
Gleamed the blue eyes of a master;
Stern they were, and proud, yet kindly.
Dark, thick locks with silver threaded
Fringed his cap of purple velvet;
Vigorous his step and movement,
Low his voice, but full, sonorous.
Up and down in his apartment
Paced he now, the while his right hand
Clenched his golden cross of office,
And oft pressed it to his bosom,
As if thus to still its throbbing.
Bowing low, the Master Steward
With crossed arms the chamber entered.
He was many years the elder,
And his body vastly rounder.
"Your High Reverence commanded,"
Said he humbly, "that your servant"—

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"No, Johannes! Naught of Reverence!"
Paulus checked him, "I have called thee
As my friend with whom I 've broken
Bread uncounted times together"—
"Yea, and drained uncounted wine casks,"
Thought the portly Master Steward.
"I need friendly counsel, brother;"
Said the Abbot, "come, sit near me;
Lend to me thy ear, Johannes:
But thy tongue must needs be fettered,
And beyond this threshold, never
May a single word escape thee."
And the Abbot faced his listener
In a solemn tone proceeding:

"Long ago, within a palace,
Lived two youthful knights together,
Pledged by oath to sacred friendship;
Both rode to the chase with ardor,
Both alike sat firm in saddle,
And, like-skilled, their weapons wielded.
At this court there dwelt a maiden,
An attendant of the Princess,—
Hildegard her name,—whose fairness
Was enhanced by rarest virtues,
And a nature blithe and sunny.
Golden hair of dazzling beauty,
Unrestrained by net or coiffure,
Flowed about her shapely shoulders.

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Soon her loveliness enkindled
Both their knightly hearts, resistless;
And each sued by word and action
For acceptance of his homage.
Hildegard to both was gracious,
And if in her heart, deep hidden,
She loved one above the other,
By no deed, or look, or whisper
Did she e'er reveal her secret.
Thus the rivals' plighted friendship
By severest strain was tested;
Faithfully they kept their pledges,
Both adoring her, both suffering.

"It was anno nine and ninety,
With the Swiss a feud was kindled,
When their Prince was called for service
As a vassal to the standard
Of the Emperor Maximilian;
And the valiant knights both followed
In the war train of their liege lord.
Then the one addressed his comrade:
'Of us two, 't were best one only
From the war return; the other,
If the hostile halberds spare him,
By his friend's good spear should perish;
The survivor then may freely
Woo her whom we both do covet.'
To this plan they both consented,

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And at parting each knight carried
O 'er his heart a lock, soft-curling,—
O, the lustrous hair, Johannes!
Never was the brow of woman
Crowned with tresses of like beauty.

"On the fierce-fought field of Dornach,
One of them—hard-pressed and hopeless,
As against great odds he struggled—
Saw his knightly rival near him,
And called out to him for succor.
False the friend who saw and heard him—
Who was free to give him aidance,
With a ready troop to follow,
And yet turned his horse to safety,
Heedless of his friend imperilled.
Wounded lay the one deserted,
In the midst of dead and dying,
Till the Swiss came to his rescue.
Then in Basle upon a pallet,
Long with death he bravely wrestled.
Often in his feverish ravings
Hildegard he saw in visions,
Radiant, starlike in her beauty,
Giving him new strength and courage.
Weary weeks rolled by unheeded,
But at last his steed he mounted
For the long, slow journey homeward.
When he neared the Prince's castle,

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Tidings of his loved one's nuptials,
Scarce a week since with his comrade,
Were to him a blow more crushing
Than the foeman's spikéd cudgels.
Broken, spent, his dreams all shattered,
Faith in God and human virtue
Seemed to him but flitting shadows,
And he uttered bitter curses,
Hurling them at saints and Heaven,
Vowing vengeance on the traitor.
Then anew he lay in fever,
Wretched, sick, by God abandoned.
When, a second time recovered,
He had from his couch arisen,
It was with a contrite spirit.
All his burning wrath had vanished;
Penitence now overcame him,
Since he 'd doubted God's great mercy.
Then he sold his steed and bridle
And his arms to aid the needy;
Yea, his very name he blotted
From the memory of the living,
So that none again should know him;
And, like Saulus in Damascus,
His proud heart he lowly humbled,
Called himself from that day Paulus,
And sought shelter in the cloister.
There is little need, Johannes,
To give names to these companions.

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One was Count Hans Hackelberend,
And the cowléd monk—behold him!"

Pausing in his tale, the Abbot
Opened wide an oaken coffer,
And before the Master Steward
Placed an unclasped jewelled locket;
In it lay a curling ringlet
Of a wondrous golden lustre.
Both were mute, but when Johannes
Moved his lips as if to question,
Paulus checked him: "Silence, brother!
For the story is not ended.
There is more and worse to follow:
Still I sought by fervent prayers,
By long fasts and cruel penance,
Riddance of all worldly pleasures,
Of unholy thoughts and wishes;
Read of saints and holy fathers,
Read and wrote till dawn of morning;
Much I found, save what I searched for,
Peace of mind and resignation.
Later, then, I begged admittance
To the Walkenrieden Convent,
Well content to be thus nearer
Treseburg, where dwelt my lady;
For beneath the monk's black habit
Still survived the knight and lover.
As with heavy fetters weighted,

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Ever suffering, nigh despairing,
Days and weeks and months passed slowly,
While I bitterly regretted
My rash act of world renouncement.
When I heard of feud and warfare
Outside in the realm, great longing
Seized my torn and peaceless spirit,—
Like a bird in cage imprisoned
When its mates are southward flying.
Often was I well-nigh ready
For escape, my cowl exchanging
For a knightly helm and armor,
But I lingered on in anguish.
Tempted by my heart's deep yearning,
From afar I longed to see her,
But this mad desire I conquered.
Yet I once met Hackelberend,
And my hood I quick drew o'er me,
Till he passed me by unheeding,
And so well have I contrived it
That he has not yet suspected
Walkenrieden's hated Abbot
Is his erstwhile friend and comrade,
Once called Egon, Count of Hordorf,
Long deemed dead and nigh forgotten.

"But the Countess Hackelberend,
Hearing of the monk, whose learning
Spread his fame beyond the convent,

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Came to him to make confession.
From my cell and Plato summoned
Hastened I to my confessional,
Knowing neither name nor station
Of the one whose stricken conscience
Needed priestly intercession,
And, as wont, I calmly entered.
But, Johannes! What wild tumult
Fell upon me as I listened
To that voice so well remembered!
Not an instant's doubt possessed me:
It was she—my best belovéd!
'T was as if her soul's white passion
Entered into mine and scorched it
With a flame of heavenly anguish—
Anguish that o'erran my being,
Vibrant like some windswept harpstring!
From my seat behind the lattice,
In the chapel's gloomy twilight
I saw Hild'gard's tresses gleaming.
Dazed and mastered by emotion,
Reeling in my stall I sat there.
And the sin of her confessing?
'T was her love, a love undying,
For the Knight, Count Egon Hordorf—
For the one to whom she weeping
Her great sorrow now confided!
From her lips I heard the story
Of the comrades' plighted friendship,

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Of the call to war, the parting,
And her fervent prayer to Heaven
That I might be saved to claim her,
And our love find its fulfilment.
Then returned Count Hackelberend
Telling of the death of Egon.
Filled with hopeless grief, and thinking
She would honor her lost lover,
As a sacrifice and tribute
To the memory of Egon,
This, his dearest friend, she wedded.
Never, though, had his loved image
From her heart been wholly banished;
Often she in dreams beheld him—
In the arms of Hackelberend
It was Egon she remembered,
And thus in the man beside her
She had loved the friend departed;
And a vivid premonition
Had incessantly pursued her
That Count Hordorf still was living,
And that she again would meet him
To whose soul she was united,
Then as in the life hereafter.
But her conscience preyed upon her,
For her heart was all unfaithful
To the Count, her lawful husband:
So in her distress and sorrow
She besought my priestly counsel.

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"Now, Johannes, when great burdens
Are imposed on man by Heaven,
He should murmur not, but bear them;
If the load becomes too heavy,
He may sink, when strength forsakes him,
As beneath the cross our Savior;
Or the flesh revolts, and leads him
On to guilt and base dishonor.
Thus I fell when I was tempted.
Undeceived by that confession,
Peace and hope were gone forever.
Then I knew that with fair Hild'gard,
I 'd have lived, my earth an Eden,
As an honored knight and noble
In the castle of my fathers.
Now was I a broken friar,
Sad, defrauded, close imprisoned
In a convent's narrow limits.
I 'll not tell to thee the struggle
That beset the monk confessor.
Twenty years since then have vanished,
Yet whene'er that memory wakens
Once again the storm bursts o'er me.
Bold, defiant projects darted
Through my brain like lightning flashes.
One resolve, though, stood unshaken:
I would plan a meeting with her;
But not here in this my dungeon,
Nor within the stifling convent;

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Outside, under God's bright heaven,
I 'd devise some way to see her,—
Only once and never after.
In a muffled voice I answered
Time for prayer and thought was needed,
Ere I could absolve her wholly;
Yet I bade her be of comfort,
And at sunset in the forest,
Humbly suppliant for His blessing,
At the cross invoke the Savior.—
It was then and there I met her.
Joy and anguish intermingled
As our hearts beat close together,
Once with tenderness embracing,
But to part again forever.
Hild'gard's very soul was riven,
And by grief she was so stricken,
That within the se'nnight following
Came her passing. Peace be with her!

"Thrice ye 've chosen me your Abbot;
Twice did I refuse the honor,
But now as your faithful shepherd,
Bear I abbot's staff and mitre.
Mindful of a charge so sacred,
I maintain with instant duty
All the power of the convent.
Thus it was on me incumbent
To admonish, yea, to threaten

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The offending Hackelberend.
Now this monster has committed
An outrageous crime 'gainst Heaven,
And the Church's curse must follow;
But I know not yet my duty.
Is it meet and right, Johannes,—
Dare I, with my own vows broken
At the very cross he shattered,
With my conscience sorely burdened
By the death of Countess Hild'gard,
Now approach our holy altar
And proscribe her loathéd husband?
While I bear him deadly hatred,
Does a lover's wrath not arm me
When I smite with Heaven's vengeance?
Now thou knowest all, Johannes;
I await thy friendly counsel!"

Long Johannes sat in silence,
Wrapt in thought and sternly visaged;
Then he slowly gave his answer:
"If thou all to me submittest
To decide and render judgment,
Grant me time for due reflection
And for prayerful meditation.
Weighing well thy words, I 'll judge thee
What is meet and what thy duty.
Guard thy cell, and if thou hearest
Chapter bell at sunset tolling,

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Know that acting by thy warrant
I have summoned all the council.
When the brothers have assembled
In the Chapter hall together,
Then by virtue of thy office
Lay the Church's ban upon him.
Hear'st thou naught, let God's great mercy
Mete out justice to the sinner."

Clasping hands in faithful silence,
Paulus and Johannes parted.
Slowly dragged the hours of waiting
In their lonely cell seclusion.
When at eve the lingering glimmer
From the golden cross had faded,
Loud the bells rang out, resounding
Deep-toned, solemn, woe-portending.
Full arrayed, the Abbot Paulus,
With his silver staff and mitre,
Firm of step the Chapter entered,
Striding straightway to the lectern,
And before the grave assembly
Uttered excommunication
Of the Count Hans Hackelberend,
And consigned him, soul and body,
To damnation everlasting.

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VIII

Wulfhilde and Waldtraut

IN wild caprice the rushing Bode
  Skirts towering cliff and rocky wall,
And thundering down the narrow gorges,
  Escapes the granite giant's thrall.
In widened vale through mead and woodland
  It gleams, and winds, and gaily plays,
And spatters foam on stones and ledges
  That chide it in its sportive ways.
It skips along the lush green meadows
  To give the thirsty herbage drink,
And rippling onward, idly dallies
  Close by the darkling forest's brink.
It lures the trees that lean above it
  Within its cooling dews to lave,
And see their over-drooping tresses
  Submerged beneath the tranquil wave;
Beside them in its crystal mirror
  The clouds and sun and moon are shown;
Below disport the trout and grayling;
  Glass-clear lie sand and pebble stone.

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O'er purling, plashing, murmuring eddies,
Where legend's treasure-trove abounds,
In unison from wind and waters
A low and dreamy chant resounds.

Here, where the placid shallows dimpled
And Nature in soft dalliance smiled,
Sat Wulfhild' and her wood nymph Waldtraut,
And twining wreaths their time beguiled.
Forget-me-nots so blue and tender
Wulfhilde for sweet Waldtraut wove,
While Waldtraut wound for her dear lady
Green leaves new plucked from out the grove.
Wulfhilde sought no sun-dyed floweret
That there its dainty head did rear,
But chose to wear for her adorning
The lustred oak leaf's green austere.
How differing, yet how like, these maidens,—
As two sea pearls by waves upthrown,
Or as the wild and fragrant berry
Resembles those in gardens grown.
Like that of sisters was their beauty
In every softly rounded line,
In eyes' deep blue, and brows' high arching,
Rose cheeks, and lips like glowing wine.
There was in Wulfhild's high demeanor
A trace that told of proud descent,
And yet a touch of melancholy
With her sweet laugh and glances blent;

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But from the roguish eyes of Waldtraut
A blithesome, happy spirit smiled,
And all she felt, or thought, or uttered,
Revealed the simple-hearted child.
While her slight wound was slowly healing
A loving trust and friendship grew,
And maiden confidence and wisdom
Each from the other fondly drew.
"Wouldst have me tell thee," queried Waldtraut,
"How this forget-me-not was named?
'T was not to give a lover's message
That thus the tender words were framed.
Should one with magic rod discover
A hidden treasure, I 've been told,
This flower upon his hat will lead him
To dark, deep caverns heaped with gold;
Nor will the dreadful dragons harm him,
While dropping hat and fairy guide
He gathers freely from the riches,—
Till loud resounds on every side:
'Begone! Begone: and take thy treasure!'
With pillaged hoard he turns to fly,
And hat and flower are forgotten,—
When through fierce flames he hears a cry:
'Forget-me-not!' Then should he waver
And leave the calling flower behind,
His new-found wealth at once would vanish;
His way to earth he ne'er could find!"

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"Are treasures truly there?" asked Wulfhild',
"And evil spirits down below?"
"O, ay! And woe to him who meets them,
For malice oft to man they show;
Yet some of them are kindly nixies,
Dost thou not mind the moss-maids wee?
And how, if woodmen cut three crosses
Into a trunk or fallen tree,
To give them refuge from the ghost hordes,
The little elves, that very night,
Will leave behind thick-growing branches,
That turn to gold beneath the sight.
And then, there's Eckhardt, true and faithful,
Who strides before the Woden Hosts,
And warns men to beware of witchcraft,
And all the fearsome power of ghosts;
For well he knows the fiends malignant
That joy in mortal grief and loss,
Who vanish when the early cock crows,
And dare not look upon the cross.
A horsehoof is the spirits' goblet
From which they drink all in a ring;
If travellers step into a cart-rut,
No spell upon them can they fling."
"Speak not so loud of them," begged Wulfhild',
"I shudder at the very thought;
Hast ever with thine eyes beheld them,
Or of them in the wood seen aught?"

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"Not I; but many wondrous stories
My grandam tells; she 's met, I ween,
Both Wode and his spouse, Dame Holle,
Who is the phantoms' stately Queen.
Her golden plough once went to pieces,
And with lament from out the broom
The crickets all crawled forth to help her,
And chirped to make the joiner come.
She 's called the Iron One and Wild One,
And when she shakes her bed, then, lo!
The snow flies over field and mountain,
And children name her Queen of Snow.
She loves the little ones most dearly
And keeps them always at her side;
My grandam told this story of her
Just after baby sister died:
She said that once a stricken mother,
Who wept and wept in sad despair,
While lingering at her darling's graveside,
Saw coming through the moonlit air
Dame Holle with a troop of children,
And one wee babe, the last of all,
So weary, lorn, and heavy laden
It seemed she needs to earth must fall.
The mother's tear-dimmed eyes were startled;
She stood and gazed in wonder wild,
Then to her aching heart, fast throbbing,
She caught her own, her longed-for child!
The little one, with small hands clinging,

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Crept warm within her loving breast,
And murmured, as she nestled closer,
By arms, long empty, soft caressed:
'Dear mother, cease thy piteous weeping,
For I must catch thy every tear;
See how my jug is overflowing,
And drenching e'en my kirtle here!' "

The maidens sat in thoughtful silence,
Till in a branch that o'er them grew
A bird sang; to the face of Waldtraut
A golden ray of sunlight flew!
And trilling like the brown-winged warbler,
She cried: "O, hear his happy note!
Of all the songsters he 's my favorite,
Dear robin, with the crimson throat!"
"Ah me! thy favorite!" laughed Wulfhilde,
"There 's not one on the swinging bough
Thou dost not give that self-same title,
Thou Sweet! my own loved favorite thou!"
"O, listen to his gladsome carol!
At times he pipes a shrill alarm
To warn the plover and the pheasant;
So all the hunters wish him harm.
But when men die within the forest,
This little bird, so wee and brave,
Will bury them 'neath leaves and blossoms,
And cover o'er their lonely grave."
"Thou legend-storehouse, full of wisdom!"

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Wulfhilde cried, "it doth appear
That e'en the birds tell thee their secrets,
And flowers whisper in thy ear!"
"Perhaps," laughs Waldtraut, "name and virtue
I know of many a woodland weed;
There 's much to learn, if one but listens
As flowers grow from seed to seed.
We must not think they 're mute and silent;
Each one of them, each leaf, has speech;
They have a voice,—a tiny, sweet one—
That fails our blunted ears to reach,
And deaf we are to all their prattle;
But it is well they are not heard,
For else there would be such a clatter
We could not understand a word."

"Now," Wulfhild' spoke, "don thy bright chaplet!"
And Waldtraut answered merrily:
"I, too, can wind around thy tresses
The wreath that I have twined for thee."
In Waldtraut's hair, where sunlight glinted,
Appeared the dainty band of blue,
As if by hand of fairies fashioned
To gild her loveliness anew.
On Wulfhild's head, more proudly chiselled,
The oak conferred its stateliness,
And, crowned in all her youthful glory,

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She seemed, in truth, a fair princess.
Waldtraut's blue eyes looked on her gravely:
"Whoever wears the oak's firm leaf
Will love with loyal, deep affection,
If love bring joy or withering grief."
"Joy!" sighed Wulfhilde, sadly smiling,
With downcast look and shake of head,
"As deep my love is, in like measure
My heart to blight and pain is wed!
But come, dear child, what saith the emblem
That nestles in thy sunny hair?"
And in a quaintly tender warble
Waldtraut began this plaintive air:

A floweret blue with a wistful look
Bade the sea-bound wavelets in the brook:
"Forget-me-not!"
They laughed: "We must leave all behind,
And out of sight is out of mind,
Forget-me-not!"

Eyes, bright and blue, of a little maid
Beamed on a comely lad and said:
"Forget-me-not!"
The youth saw beckoning sails unfurled,
And he would roam and see the world.
Forget-me-not!

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When lone on the deep, the day grew dim,
And stars shone fair, then woe seized him,
Forget-me-not!
He leaned to the waves with a yearning look,
And lo! they sang the song of the brook:
"Forget-me-not!"

"Forget," breathed Wulfhild', "ah, how gladly,
And so in peace to bear my lot;
But how shall speeding time bring comfort,
When sorrow calls: 'Forget-me-not!'
I 'll sing to thee, if thou wilt listen,
The sad strain of a restless heart;
'T will seem so strange to thee and hopeless,
And from thy happiness apart:"

The dayspring is past, and the sun's journey endeth,
O haste thee away, thou unpitying light!
And thou, as thy shadowy mantle descendeth,
O bring me his image, thou solacing night!

Again shall my eyes in their rapture behold him,
The star of my life that has faded away.
Again to this breast shall these loving arms fold him,
And thou, O my heart, dream he 'll love thee for aye!

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O dolorous love, that can never know waning!
How cruel thy torment! How fatal my plight!
If day with its fervor bring grief and complaining,
Come thou, and beguile me, more merciful night!

Waldtraut, who felt the wistful sadness
That sighed in Wulfhild's every word,
Embraced her friend, and softly carolled
A soothing lay, like some night bird:

In dewy grass, the slumbering flowers
Dream of the bee, full-honeyed, flown,
And night winds sigh in leafy bowers:
"O dost thou sleep, my love, my own?"
And pale the moon floats o'er the wood.

The drowsy boughs with soft caresses
Sway in the gently murmuring tree,
And every whispering leaf confesses:
"Forever I'll be true to thee!"
And pale the moon floats o'er the wood.

Now all the amorous airs are dying,
And lulling peace sleeps in my breast;
On thee the night's soft kiss is lying:
O joy be thine, my love, and rest!
And pale the moon floats o'er the wood.

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There passed through copse and tangled thicket
A gust of cool, refreshing air;
The tender sprays and drooping branches
Began to shiver everywhere.
In stillness born, to silence dying,
Its light wings sped in rustling flight;
And with a breathless, low suspiring
Long whispers told of coming night.
It was the wind that stirs at even,
And slips through foliage and bloom
As if it cautiously on tiptoe
Stole through the wood in twilight's gloom.

The maids turned home, and on their pathway
Encountered, coming from the chase,
With arms and spoil, the Count and Albrecht,—
Contentment mirrored in each face.
With branches covered, Bruno carried
A roebuck that his master slew,
While Ludolf dragged along beside him
A wolf whose life-blood Albrecht drew.
Devotion shone in Waldtraut's glances,
Avowing all, though lips were mute;
While Wulfhild' scarcely deigned to answer
Her cousin's chivalrous salute.
The Count with pleasure looked upon them,
Gazed thoughtfully into their eyes,
And lingeringly surveyed the picture
That held him there by twofold ties.

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The young Knight spoke: "Though well, dear
cousin,
The dark green oak becomes thy face,
'T is passing strange that not a blossom
In all thy garland finds a place!"
Wulfhilde answered, slightly trembling:
"The flower and leaf we chanced to find;
Her wreath enhances Waldtraut's graces,
To simple green my choice inclined."
"And wisely hast thou done, my daughter,
For duty did thy choice allot,
Since thou, the oak, must ever shelter
This tender, blue forget-me-not."
The Count spoke mildly, as if blessings
From days of yore to him recurred,
And some long-vanished, conquered sorrow
His seared, embittered spirit stirred.
"How is it," he continued kindly,
"That thou, Waldtraut, dost never ask
For any favor I might grant thee?
To-day I 'm merry! Name the task!"
"O, then, to-day, Sir Count, I 'll beg thee
The great destructive boar to slay,
That ravages the poor folks' harvest,
Who for some swift deliverance pray!"
"If thy desires extend no farther,
Why, child, I pledge my huntsman's word,
His tusks shall soon adorn thy necklace,
And of his harm no more be heard;

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We 'll seek his lair upon the morrow
  And speedily he 'll meet his end!"
Thus laughs the Count, as on he leads them,
  And they the castled hill ascend.
The air is sultry, not a glimmer
  Is visible of moon or star,
And ceaseless, dismal sheets of lightning
  Illume the darkling clouds afar.

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IX

The Poacher

O HOLY dawn of morn! Exalted
Is he who moves through thy domain,
And of thy glow and gleaming pageant
With seeing eye a glimpse doth gain!
Resplendent is the forest temple
With colors rare in dazzling sheen,
Its verdure laved in thy bright fountains,
Restored to April's living green.
The jovial hunter oft beholds it
When starting forth in joyous mood,
He hails the first soft gray of dawning,
And with his dog hies to the wood.
The collier sees it, too, while piling
The rounded mound of wood he builds,
When stars grow faint and day's bright herald
The summit of the mountain gilds.
The strolling minstrel feasts upon it,
Who here has welcome lodging found,
Host Greenwood's guest, a weary wanderer,

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In mantle wrapped upon the ground;
His harpstrings sound to golden measures,
In contrast with his meagre purse,
And vying with the feathered minstrels,
He is as blithe, nor fares he worse.
The blended perfume, gently wafted,
Is like a strong and spicy wine,
And scattered with the lavish dewdrops,
A million flashing jewels shine.
Here beads of crystal clearness tremble;
There sparkle green and crimson gems,
Bright grains of gold and glinting silver
And diamond dust on fretted stems.
The brigand spider, always lurking
For guileless victims come to grief,
Holds many tiny, limpid globules
In his outspread, ensnaring sieve.
High trots the fox, alert and nimble;
His feathered friends are long awake—
Afar is heard a lusty crowing.
The stag treads slowly through the brake;
Beside the forest's edge he 's feasted
Upon the peasant's ripening grain,
And cautiously, with paling starlight,
He seeks his sheltered lodge again.
The dew is chill and in the open
He stretches on the greensward there
To let the grateful early sunshine
Dry off his tawny coat of hair.

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The Count and all his hunt attendants
  At daybreak through the forest chase
To close around the monster lead boar
  And track him to his hiding-place.
They range without a dog and singly,
  Yet close together circling nigh,
So each can hear, if need arises,
  The other's horn or hunting cry.
The collier, too, slips through the thicket
  Where dense the netted branches grow;
Far distant from his home and coal-kiln
  He poaches with his ready bow.
The deer, refreshed, his proud head shaking,
  No longer trusts to open glade,
And slowly from his couch arises
  To find his wonted harbor's shade;
When suddenly an arrow strikes him,
  Like winds he flies the brake to cross,
But speedily his strength forsakes him
  And down he kneels upon the moss.
The collier hides away the weapon
  That sped his shaft; a trail of blood
Leads to the stag, now still and lifeless,
  Outstretched upon the purpled sod.
With keen-edged knife, the hide first slitting,
  The poacher calmly flays the deer,—
A fox, upon a rock projecting,
  Looks on and hankers to be near;
His glittering eyes betray his pleasure,

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In hunger keen he licks his beard,
And hopes to find a dainty morsel
Whene'er the man has disappeared.

The collier ponders for a moment
How with the spoils he 'll reach his cot—
"Stay, Volrat! Do not move a finger
Else I will shoot thee on the spot!"
It is the Count with levelled cross-bow,
And on the trigger rests his hand.
The poacher, for an instant startled,
With calmness meets the stern demand:
"Your victim you have keenly scented!
Shoot quick, Sir Count, and tremble not!
For if by chance you now should miss me,
You 'd never have another shot!"
He pauses midway in the open,
Holds tightly clasped his bloody knife;
But firm the Count strides on to meet him
In deadly conflict, life for life.
They stand at bay a few short moments,
Both silent; then begins the Knight:
"There 's still escape from thy just merits;
I can forgive and bear no spite!"
"Not so for me! May God pass judgment
And grant you mercy, if He can,
But here let the account be settled
Between us two, now, man for man!"
"Give me my own and it will cancel

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All differences 'twixt thee and me;
Be Waldtraut mine, then shall thy freedom
With right of chase be granted thee!"
"O that the lightning's bolt might blast thee!
The tale of Ludolf, then, is true!
List! I would rather see her buried
Than leave her, God-accursed, with you!"

The Count, enraged, with fury trembles,
Blows on his horn the call for aid,
Then hurls himself for mortal combat,
Within his hand the unsheathed blade.
He reaches not the agile poacher
Who vainly lunges at his breast,
For both, the lifted forearms clutching,
The weapons in their course arrest.
In vengeful, desperate contention
They trample o'er the level space,
Draw near the stag, while madly grappling,
And struggle in a fierce embrace.
The tangling antlers trip the collier;
The Count rolls o'er him on the sod,
And each to free himself endeavors,
Athirst for his fell foeman's blood.
The huntsmen toward them rush with Albrecht
In answer to the bugle blast,
And quickly overpower the poacher,
Who pinioned to the ground is cast.
Now Ludolf swiftly comes to join them,

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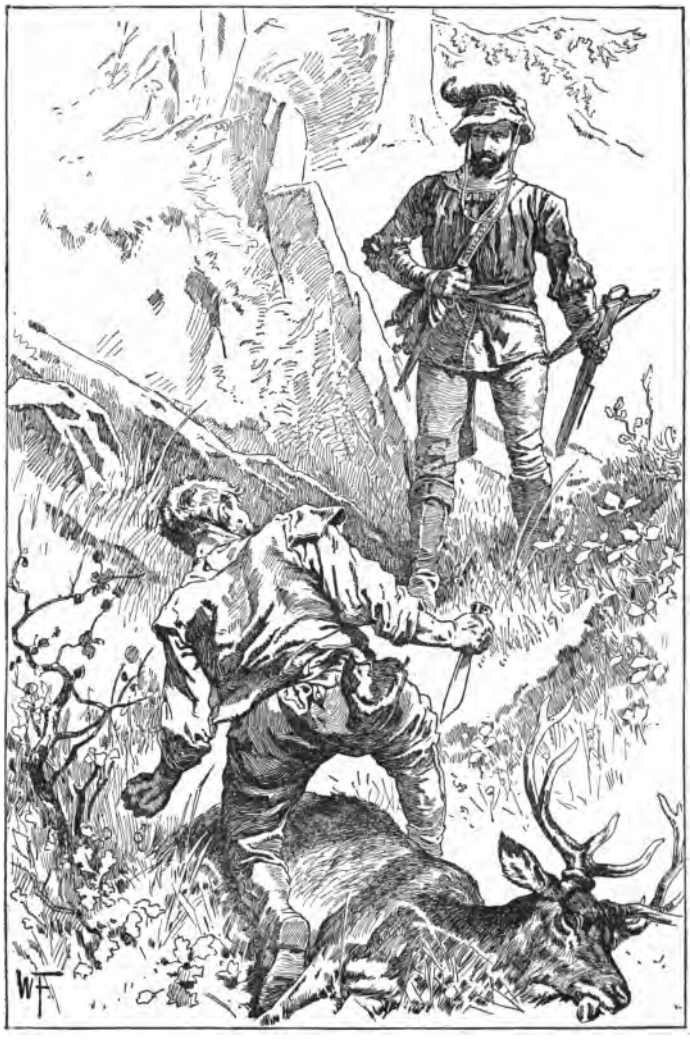

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And Gerhard speeds to bring relief;
Count Hackelberend gives the order:
"Up to the castle with the thief!"
Thereon he steps aside with Albrecht
And bids him: "Go and tarry not!
Thou 'lt act as escort to the maidens,
Who spend the day at Aulke's cot;
And there do thou awhile detain them
Till I this poacher's pride shall quench:
Within the hour he 'll ride to forest
Upon the stag that 's in the trench!"
"Nay, uncle!" Albrecht pleads in terror,
"Without due process and decree
Thou canst not put to death and torture."
"I asked not for advice from thee!"
And swelling veins show his resentment,
But Ludolf, who has overheard,
Exchanges stealthy looks with Albrecht,
Who asks his uncle undeterred:
"Wilt thou let Ludolf come to guide me?
Which way to take I hardly know:
The paths diverge to Aulke's cabin."
The Count consents for both to go.
When once the pair are out of earshot
They counsel in an eager quest
Of some device to save the poacher,
And thwart the vengeful Count's behest.
Perchance, before its dread fulfilment,
And ere all efforts come too late,

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Wulfhilde might restrain her father,
  Or Waldtraut, mild, appease his hate.
They hasten on with flying footsteps,
  But Albrecht soon from Ludolf parts,
He takes the shortest path to Aulke,
  While Ludolf through the forest darts.

The huntsmen with the hapless collier
  Arrive upon the castle hill;
Soon with a net the stag is captured,
  Thrown on his back and held at will.
They cross and tie his legs, and drag him
  Up from the moat with all their strength;
Then on the beast, to fury goaded,
  They stretch the collier at full length.
But Gerhard, who in faithful service
  Quailed at no task, ne'er felt so loath
To carry out his master's bidding,
  And humbly says: "I 'll keep my oath
To do, Sir, what you may command me;
  Yet as your oldest servant plead,
While it is meet that he be punished,
  Let mercy justice here exceed."
"The man who shrinks shall lie in shackles,
  E'en if he eldest liegeman be!"
Bursts out the Count. "I 've failed thee, Volrat!"—
  The falconer sighs—"Bend thou the knee!"
"What! Kneel to him? 'T is said this stag here

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Has in its heart a cross of bone!
Nay, bind me on!" exclaims the collier,
"For his base heart is all of stone!"
The men stand pale and hesitating;
The Count in frenzy stamps: "Obey!"
Waldtraut, where art thou? Chatting? Laughing?
Or twining garlands on the way?
The deed is done. Securely fastened
Upon the deer the collier lies;
And now, as if the dogs were on him,
The stag into the forest flies.

And meanwhile, Ludolf lies in waiting,
Within a hollow, screened from sight,
And where, as his keen woodcraft teaches,
The stag will turn in frantic flight.
"If Albrecht should not find the maidens,
Or if they plead in vain—alas!"
He mutters, and as slow as hours
To him the minutes seem to pass.
With head bent low he harks intently—
A pecking bird; a creaking limb;
A falling leaf; the wind's faint whisper;
Each startles and affrightens him.
His courage sinks; he shakes and falters
Unlike a man resolved to save,
But like one lying low to murder,
Whose bow is strung to fill a grave.

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At last there rises from the valley
A rustle, then a crash and roar,
That with a tempest's rush draws nearer—
Now rally, Soul! Be faint no more!
Take steady aim! Hold firm thy cross-bow!
As lightning swift there dashes on
A something, flitting by the hunter,
More felt than seen. He shoots! 'T is gone!
He hears the maddening race continue.
"The shot has failed! He 'll soon be crushed!"
The clatter lessens in the distance;
But, hark! It stops and all is hushed.
"He 's hit!" cries Ludolf, "Volrat 's rescued!"
And, hastening on with speed of hound,
Beholds the stricken deer expiring,
His rider safe upon the ground.
They say but little to each other,
As Ludolf Volrat's thongs unties;
The collier clasps his hand on rising,
And looks into the hunter's eyes:
"Share what is mine!" he cries, "O comrade,
My Waldtraut thee I gladly give,
But I will hie to Thomas Muenzer,
Hence only for revenge to live."

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X

The Boar Hunt

THE sultry, breathless days that followed
Seemed harbingers of destined woe,
And sullen clouds of raven blackness,
Like sombre penance robes, hung low.
'T is bleak and dismal in the valley,
The threatening cliffs the heavens defy;
With hollow roar the Bode's waters
Roll on beneath the lowering sky.
It is as if a prison's shackles
Were thrown on all that revelled free,
And peace and joy within the castle
Were banished by a stern decree.
The merry chase no longer pleases,
Delight no more in song is found,
No laughter rings from hall or tower,
No falcon call, no bugle sound.
And sorely do they feel the absence
Of one most dearly loved by all—
Waldtraut has silently departed,

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And vain is every search and call.
It seemed as if she carried with her
The bright blue sky, the genial sun,
The sportive jests and care-free laughter,
The merry tales by Wenzel spun.
She left behind her care and peril,
That had till now been veiled from sight;
As if dispelled by her bright spirit
They reappeared upon her flight:
For frequently of late came tidings
Of unrelenting, cruel feud;
From far and near the peasants gathered,
Their hands with noble blood imbrued.
Men talked about the Helfensteiner,
Whom they had slain in deadly strife,
Whose Weinsberg castle they had pillaged,
And, ruthless, tortured his fair wife;
Of Jacklein Rohrbach's feast at Easter,
And Berlichingen's iron hand,
Of Metzler, Hippler, Florian Geyer,
And Ulric, Duke of Swabian land.

Count Hackelberend, too, was hated
By country folk, whose yellowing grain,
Swept down as if by hail or tempest,
Lay wasted in the Huntsman's train.
And then, broadcast, men told the story
Of Volrat and the madding chase,
How he upon the stag was pinioned;

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And thus the rancor grew apace.
The Count alone cared naught for larums;
Though peasant hut and princely hall
Were ravaged, he ne'er feared the havoc
That his own castle might befall.
When told the Abbot had proscribed him,
He laughed aloud and grimly said:
"The one who meddles with a wasp nest
A little buzzing must not dread."
Yet his keen eye had marked the trouble
And gloom revealed in every face,
And straight the ancient charm he offered:
"Ho! Make you ready for the chase!"
The needful spears again are gathered,
That in the hunt of boar and deer
Have often trusty service rendered.
No timid game, that flies in fear,
Is sought to-day, but one ferocious,
The hated boar in all his might,
Destroyer of the ripening harvest,
To Waldtraut promised by the Knight.

The kennel's strongest dogs are with them,
The limer on the leash ahead,
To find again the trace uncovered,
Where late the coursing huntsmen sped.
Here deep within the black morasses
The savage beasts secrete their lair;
Here lurk amid the sombrous twilight

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The eagle-owl, wild boar and bear.
Gigantic oaks, like massive pillars,
Uphold the forest's towering dome—
Their gnarly roots stretched o'er the surface,
Like dragons in their caverned home—
Some half in leaf and half decaying,
By tempest torn and lightning blast,
While others stand in stately beauty
Of dark green foliage amassed.
The huntsmen steadily press forward,
The Count leads on his eager band,
Yet each one feels and sees in others
A change he scarce can understand.
But most of all their master's bearing
Now fills them with a vague concern:
He 's heedless of the quarry's traces,
And shows alarm at every turn.
Uneasily his roving glances
Search every screening bush and tree,
As if to find some fearful presence—
A foe from whom he needs must flee.
His heart is filled with dark foreboding,
And oft he stops for breath and rest,
While plodding slowly through the forest,
As if by heavy weight oppressed.

Half-hid within the miry burrows,
Close huddled lie the wild, black swine;
They start and charge in sudden rushes,

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And grunt and grub 'neath root and vine.
But little heed the watchful huntsmen
The lesser brutes, or wary sow,—
'T is only for the monster lead boar
That men and dogs are searching now.
The lime-hound, from the line unfastened,
Barks sharply and pursues the track;
Unleashed, set on with growing fury,
Now follows unrestrained the pack.
"Seek! Seek! Seek sow!" urge on the hunters.
The brushwood crashes in the bogs,
And rushing forth, alert and ready,
The boar is seized by sharp-fanged dogs.
He flings them off and stands defiant
And battles—one opposed to ten.
Soon five from gashes bleed; the others
Surround him as within a pen.
His back the valiant champion shelters
Against an oak and strikes about,
Each time a daring hound assails him;
Erect his bristle mane stands out.
As with a hedge, approach forbidding,
He wields his curving tusk with might,
Against the roots he whets it frothing,
And ploughs the soil in stubborn spite.
From out the thicket, rash, impulsive,
The Count hastes on, himself at last,
And sets the iron spear for stabbing,
But now—why stands he thus aghast?

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What sways from lightning-blasted oak tree?
A wind-blown branch? or withered limb?
A hunter from the realm of spirits?
Or Woden's self? What seizes him
To chill his blood with icy horror?
As if some fiend had bid him "Stay!"
He stands transfixed, and in a moment
Is stricken by the boar at bay.
He falls upon the earth resistless,
Though, with a bound that naught could check,
Fierce Willé fells the snorting monster,
And sinks his fangs into his neck.
Then Gerhard swings his spear in passion,
And deals the beast a mortal wound,
That silently, without a struggle,
Sinks dead upon the bloody ground.
In pallor all the doughty huntsmen
Around their helpless master stand.
Who ever knew his lance to fail him?
What spell had stayed his mighty hand?
The Count still stares aloft in horror
And dyes the sod around him red,
The while the hunters frame a litter
Of spears with branches overspread.
The wound in haste the falconer dresses,
And strives to staunch the flowing blood;
Then, raising him upon their shoulders,
They gently bear him from the wood.

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When slowly through the forest wending,
They meet old Aulke hobbling on:
"Hey! Huntsfolk, have ye caught the lead boar?
The vicious brute, 't is well he 's gone!
Whom do I see? Your master injured?
Has he already Volrat met?
That must have been a lively tussle,
For Volrat all afire was set!"
"Witch!" cries the Count to her in terror,
And bids the men to pause for rest,
"Old hag! What mean'st thou by thy gabble?
What dost thou with thy evil jest?"
"I mean the neck is still unbroken
Of him whom on the stag you bound.
He lives, is sound in limb and body,
Has joined the League, and, like a hound,
Will seek your trail, a fierce avenger,
And know no peace until you die.
Your time has come! Your race has ended!
'T were well you bade the wood good-bye!
Ha! Clearly now I see the token—
Between your eyebrows stands the mark.
But little longer still may flicker
Your lamp of life, ere all is dark!"
"Be gone!" called Hackelberend faintly,
And quickly he was carried by,
While Aulke stood with scornful laughter
And followed with her evil eye.

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XI

The Death of Hackelberend

STRICKEN, suffering, slowly sinking,
Many days the Count lay weary
In the lofty Bergfried's chamber,
Watching through the opened casements
Clouds that rolled high o'er the mountains,
And the birds that soared to heaven.
Wrapt for hours in silent musing,
His dark eyes betrayed his yearning,
As they sought the changeful forest,
Donning now the hues of autumn.
When the wind blew through the tree-tops
And the branches seemed to beckon,
He would madly curse and order
That his horse be quickly saddled;
And when none would do his bidding,
Springing up in passion's fury,
Back he fell in sheer exhaustion,
Swooning on his heated pillow.
Once at night as he lay listless
Staring dreamily at Wulfhild',

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Ever winding her soft tresses
Round his fingers, faint a whisper
From his pallid lips repeated:
"Hildegard," till sleep enwrapped him,
And the wonted sternness faded
From his face, now wan and haggard.
Tossing in a fitful slumber,
He awakened, shouting wildly,
Calling by their names his wardens;
With halloo and hunter's signals
Urging on his dogs in anger:
"Willé, seize the monkish vermin!
Seek the peasants—monks and peasants!
Seek 'em! They deserve no better!"
And again, the night watch waning,
Cold and sudden sweat perspiring
Beaded on his high, white forehead;
Low he moaned and clutched his covering.
Hard oppressed for breath and gasping,
As in mighty throes he struggled,
Through his breast's convulsive heaving
Strained the words: "Ha! Wode! Wode!"
All in vain the careful nursing
Of Wulfhilde and Agnete,
And their scanty lore of physic;
All in vain the zeal of Gerhard,
Spending weary hours beside him;
And the Huntsman knew within him
That relentless Death drew nearer.

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Wulfhild', haunted by a terror
Lest her father die unshriven,
With the Church's ban upon him,
Rode forth early with old Bruno
To the Walkenrieden Convent.
She would see this stern-souled Abbot
And upon her knees implore him
To absolve her stricken father.
All her wealth of patrimony
She would willingly relinquish
And convey it to the Convent.
For herself the veil was destined,
Since the world would be but empty
When her last support, her father,
Like her dream of love lay buried.

Brooding, sorrowful and silent,
Gerhard watched beside his master.
"Come, old friend, be my confessor!"
Spoke the Count, from languor rousing.
" When I die, I leave behind me—
If he be among the living—
One who bears me mortal hatred;
One I 've sought not, always hoping
Nevermore to cross his pathway.
But if thou should'st ever find him,
Tell him half the wrongs I 'm charged with
He must take upon his conscience,
For they were the fruit and harvest

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Of the seed that in the furrow
Of our youth in sin we scattered.
He is Egon, Count of Hordorf;
On his scutcheon is a boar's head,
And his helm bears horns of bison.
We were oath-bound friends from boyhood,
But we both set our affections
Upon Hildegard of Warberg.
Thus with one as with the other,
'T was our love that wrought disaster.
On the battled field of Dornach,
When our crowding foes beset us,
I forsook him in his peril;
But he found his day of vengeance.
Long I thought him slain in combat,
Yet he lived to seek my Countess—
Planned a secret meeting with her
In the forest—Gerhard! Gerhard!
Ever since, e'en now, I 'm tortured
By a mad desire for knowledge—
Was her lily heart unspotted?

"Prostrate, preyed upon by sorrow,
Flowerlike, she drooped and faded,
And in dying whispers told me
Egon lived and that she loved him.
Then her lips were closed forever.
O, the torments doubt inflicted!
Did her fever turn to madness

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As the hand of Death lay on her?
Fearful thoughts and dread suspicions
Drove me, peaceless, from the castle,
O'er the mountains, through the valleys,
Hoping still to wrest the answer
From the wind, perchance, that ranges
Like me, wildly through the forest.
Hence I hunted, hunted, hunted,
As if in the hearts of victims,
Fallen by my spear or arrow,
I could find the secret hidden.
Madly roving, never sated,
Chase and hunt must I continue,
Else I perish and thereafter
Still go hunting, ever hunting—
Sorrow's flood whelms o'er me dying:
Wulfhild', lone and unprotected,
Ne'er will wed the man I chose her,
Knightly Albrecht of Loseinen—
Waldtraut, fled, is my own daughter.
While my lost wife's troth suspecting,
Saw I Holthorp in the forest,
And, enamored of her beauty,
Oft I sought and oft I met her;
Yet I loved her but to leave her.
Volrat, her rejected suitor,
Then she wed, but soon she sickened,
And the year's end saw her perished.
Volrat threatens me his vengeance;

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Even now I see him coming
With a ruthless band of peasants,
And already hear him thunder
At the gate, his firebrand swinging.
But I can nor save, nor shield you—
Wulfhild'! Waldtraut! I must leave you!

"Gerhard, ever true and faithful,
For one promise more in fealty
Clasp my hand! Swear thou'lt fulfil it!
Narrow is the grave, good Gerhard,
Of impenetrable darkness;
Depths exist there never lighted
And grim Death guards well his secrets.
Think'st thou there are forests yonder,
Stocked with beasts of game for hunting?
Thou shalt bury me, old comrade;
Thou and Bruno, ye two only.
But upon no bier ye 'll place me!
No! For me, I 'll not be coffined!
In the forest I 'll be bedded
Where the storm raves—where the tree-tops
O'er my head will sough and rustle;
Where the noble deer stalks proudly,
And the wolf roves, there bestow me
In a grave your hands shall fashion—
But no coffin! Let the oak's roots
Through my heart strike down unhindered.
Clad in leathern hose and doublet

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With my bow and horn ye 'll arm me;
Thus, with boughs of green fresh covered,
I shall sleep as fits a hunter!
When thou know'st me dead, make ready;
Then next morning ere the daybreak,
Lead forth Wunsch and bind me on him.
Firmly seated in my saddle,
As I rode forth into battle,
As I rode at chase and hunting,
Will I ride on to my burial!
High above the Raven Ledges,
Lay me 'neath the turf, but never
Let the spot be known to others;
And in lieu of monkish prayers
Blare the bugle loud above me!
There I 'll lie until the summons
To the hunter's great hereafter,
But instead of Doomsday trumpet
May a joyful horn awake me!
Gerhard, give thy oath upon it,
Thou wilt do as I have bidden."

Burning tears rolled down the withered,
Grizzled-bearded face of Gerhard,
Kneeling by his master's bedside.
With a solemn, low "I swear it"
Was the rueful answer given.
"It is well! Thou may'st now leave me!"
Bade the Count, his eyelids drooping,

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And he lay, as if in slumber,
Till the warm, moist tongue of Willé
Fondly licked his wasted fingers;
Mutely stood the dog beside him,
With one heavy paw uplifted;
Two great eyes were raised in question.
"Faithful one!" the Count said softly,
"Dear, trustworthy old companion!
Speak to me! What would'st thou ask me?
We must part. Where I am going
Thou canst follow me no longer.
No more can we three together,
Thou and Wunsch and I, go hunting
Through the wood in wind and weather,
Thou my daring scout and leader!
Dost thou see this other hunter,
Death, the grim and ancient marksman,
Come to bait me in the darkness?
Sure 's his aim. He never misses.
Farewell, Willé! Friend so loyal!
Once again be thou my escort
On this last ride through the forest,
Slow and solemn though its progress."
And his sunken cheek he rested
On the huge head of the mastiff.

Long in spirit strove the Abbot,
Obdurate, refusing audience
To Wulfhilde, broken-hearted,

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Till Johannes hastening to him
Bade him see in Hild'gard's daughter
Hild'gard's self. Then moved, o'ermastered
By the visioned dead, transfigured,
Reincarnate in the maiden,
Swift compassion came upon him.
As the falling darkness deepened,
Back to Treseburg he journeyed
With Wulfhilde and her escort,
And his train of monks and servants.
In the quivering heat the cloud heaps
Gathered, piling on the mountains,
In the calm before the tempest.
When within the dim-lit chamber
Paulus stepped close to the bedside,
Piercing, searching deep, their glances
Crossed, as sword with sword swift flashes.
On the lips of Hackelberend,
Wrathful at the apparition
Of the monk's black cowl and vestment,
Died the word, but wildly stared he
At the features of the Abbot,
As if dawning memories faintly
Rose within him, dire and dreadful.
Fiercely beat the heart of Paulus,
Nor found he the word befitting.
Mortal foes they faced each other.
Through the tower's darkened chamber
Lightning darted and the Bergfried

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Shook with deafening peals of thunder.
"Dost thou know me, Hackelberend?"
Asked with trembling voice the Abbot.
"Egon Hordorf!" came the answer
From the Count, his lips scarce moving,
And his eyes, aglare with hatred,
Starting from their sunken sockets,
As with wave of hand he motioned
All to leave except the Abbot.
"Then 't is true, he lives! O Hild'gard!"
Breathing hard, and shaken, shuddering,
He demanded: "What? What wilt thou?
Is thy vengeance still unsated
By her murder? Now must needs thou
Here my last few hours embitter,
Since I lack the strength to slay thee,
Lying helpless on my death-bed?"
"Hours weighed against a lifetime!"
Paulus cried in solemn anger,
"Could thy last hours ever cancel
All the woe thy treachery brought me?
Leave the dead in peace, for other,
Weightier business brings me to thee!"
"Egon," and the Count's voice faltered,
"With the many dead that covered
Dornach's bloody field of battle,
I, in sooth, had cause to count thee;
For when we, at first defeated,
Rallied and again rode forward,

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With the slain I found thee lifeless!"
"Yea, and happy at the riddance
Of a rival, thou didst leave me,
When beset by hostile halberds!
And again, when I lay bleeding,
Didst thou speed away unmindful
Of thy friend, and e'en the service
Due his body. Home to Hild'gard
Didst thou fly, to hope e'er clinging
That, thy perfidy succeeding,
I had perished with the many."
Flushed with fury, Hackelberend
Strove to answer his accuser,
But in impotence sank backward.

Whistling winds shrilled through the darkness;
Floods of rain beat at the casements,
And the night was rent with thunder.
Mustering strength, the Count demanded:
"What has caused thee now to seek me?
What dark purpose brings thee hither?"
"'T is to grant thee absolution,"
Gravely said the Abbot Paulus.
"Thou a priest? Thou! Egon Hordorf?
In the Devil's name betake thee
To that other saintly idler,
Who in Walkenrieden fattens!
I ask not thy curse or blessing!"
"Hackelberend, here, before thee,

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Stands he whom thou now revilest,
Paulus, Walkenrieden's Abbot!"
"Thou? What! Thou the meddling Abbot
Who our hunting strove to hinder?
Well didst thou contrive, thou trickster!
I admire thy craft to borrow
Heaven's cloak for thy dissembling!"
And the Count's wild, jeering laughter
Chimed in with the rattling thunder.
"Thou hast, like the wolf in sheep's pelt,
'Neath a cowl slunk round and striven
To outwit my wife and dupe her;
Thus on me to wreak thy vengeance!"
" 'T was but once that I met Hild'gard;
Soon thereafter death released her!"
"O, I want the truth! Thy oath must—
Stop! Too much I dread the answer,
Nor can oath of priest be trusted!"
"I came here to bury rancor,
Grant forgiveness and absolve thee
From thy sins, for it is urgent
That thou make thy peace with Heaven;
Thy allotted time is fleeting!"
"Half my sins," the Knight retorted,
"Thou must carry on thy conscience,
For 't is thou who hast provoked them.
As for Heaven, I renounce it
To you worthy priests and abbots!
Be it yours to wrangle over,

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As has ever been your custom!
Know'st thou aught of Heaven's kingdom,
Egon Hordorf, learnéd prelate?
If there 's hunting in its forests
I 'll accept thy hokus-pokus.
Show me thou art skilled in priestcraft,
And by thy smooth lies and cunning
Aid thy friend to find an entrance
Through a rear gate into Heaven!
But there must be woods and hunting!"
"Heed'st thou not the Lord Almighty
Speaking in His voice of thunder,
As He summons thee to judgment?"
"Come! Announce me! Say, a hunter
Nobly horsed, demands admittance.
All the hunting rights in Heaven
He would lease for life eternal.
He 'd agree fresh game to furnish
For the Lord's supernal table,
With its seats for saints and angels,
And you priests, if you 're admitted;
But what else there is hereafter,
Bliss of soul, delight and rapture,
Let Him keep to spice His drink with!"
Through the night again flashed lightning;
Ghastly grew the Count's wan features,
As for breath he gasped and struggled,
While the thundering tempest bellowed.
"Pray! O, pray! Thine end approaches!"

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Paulus urged with cross uplifted.
"Pray? For what? To whom? Thou ranter!
I 'll not pray, but hunt. Ho! Hunting!
Hear'st thou? Chase and hunt forever!
Yet, perchance—yea, here 's a prayer:
'Mighty God! O, deign to grant me
That in Thy celestial forest
Through eternities unnumbered
I may revel, revel hunting!
Mark my words and heed me, Ancient!
Or from Thy high throne I 'll shoot Thee,
As erewhile Thy Son's frail image
From the cross I dashed to atoms!
This the notice that I serve Thee!
This the Amen to my worship!'
Art thou now contented, bigot?"
"Lord, forgive him!" cried the Abbot,
"He is mad with death's wild frenzy!"
"There is naught He need forgive me!
It is He who needs forgiveness,
As with His dull death He balks me
Of my sport within the forest.
Hunt I will! Will hunt, I tell thee!
Yea, though damned, I 'll hunt forever!"
Paulus turned and cried in anger:
"Ended is my long forbearance!
Be thou damned, then, damned forever!
And go hunt until the Doomsday!"
"Thank thee for thy blessing, Paulus!

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As the Lord's anointed, surely
Thou canst intercede and help me!"
Hackelberend mocked and shivered.
"Hunting, hunt for aye and ever!
Hal-loo! Ho! Ho-ho!" Half upright
He had risen, when the chamber
Burst aflame with dreadful lightning
And the walls of granite trembled
With the crashing roar of thunder.
"Wode! Ho!" cried Hackelberend,
And fell dead upon his pillow.

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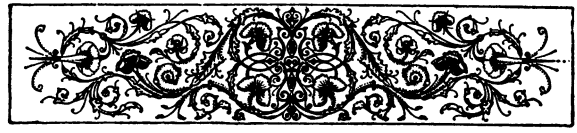

XII

To the Grave

ON fallow deer skins softly bedded,
Attired and armed as for the chase,
Half covered o'er with twinéd myrtles,
Reposed the last of all his race.
He firmly clasped, as were he living,
His cross-bow, oft with prowess borne;
The hunting knife beside him rested,
And on his right his ivory horn.
A rare and lustrous jewel sparkled
Upon the golden chain it crowned;
A wreath of freshly gathered oak leaves
About the silent head was wound.
Thus lay the prince of chase and forest,
The hunter brave, whom naught withstood,—
Who, in free Nature's breath rejoicing,
With willing band had roved the wood.
His dark, stern eyes were closed forever
That flashed as if with fire aglow,
When, searching sky or tangled thicket,

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He flung the spear or drew the bow.
Upon his furrowed brow there struggled
Grim Death in his resistless might,
With ominous and hopeless terror
Of unappeased and horrid Night.
No sweet repose here reigned supremely,
No new-lit glory found a place,
That told of blessedness hereafter,
On this unyielding marble face.
Upon this form, to dust returning,
Stood out relentless force of will,
And, mirrored in those rigid features,
A burning passion smoldered still.
Around the mouth that scoffed at Heaven
There lingered sullen scorn unchanged,
As if in anger dumb yet vowing
On Death himself to be avenged.
Thus lay he in the tower chamber,
And Willé, truest of his kind,
Crouched near to hold a solemn death-watch,
Nor call nor chiding did he mind.
The Abbot tarried in the castle,
For he was loath to leave Wulfhild',
And, full of pity for the orphan,
Her grief with soothing counsel stilled.
A trusty friend, he 'd be her escort,
When low the Count lay in his grave,
To lead her to the maiden's chapter,
That for her peace best promise gave.

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He spoke not of the curse inflicted
  Upon her father ere he died;
Agnete, though, had slyly listened
  And heard the blessing said to guide
Their master past the gate of Heaven
  Into the woeful place below;
And by her tongue once fairly started
  The secret was like tracks in snow.
One softly told it to another,
  Who deemed it true and told again,
Till like the wind it swiftly circled
  Afar o'er mountain, dale and plain.

So came the night of his last mounting;
  And ere the birds are slumber-freed,
Within the castle court the hostler
  Stands ready by the saddled steed.
O Wunsch! Thou oft hast pawed the cobbles
  Impatiently before the ride,
While waiting for thy master's greeting,
  The music of his spur-clad stride.
How often hast thou borne him safely,
  Impetuous as the North Wind free!
The bridges thundered in the valley,
  Along thy track shook every tree!
To-day he mounts a silent rider,
  And slow his pace; thou 'lt feel no spur!
O, bear him gently! Short the distance!
  It is but to his sepulchre!

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The court is lit by blazing torches,
  That set the Bergfried all aglow;
Around are ranged the castle inmates,
  Whose downcast looks deep sorrow show.
By two, the eldest in his service,
  The Count is carried through the door;
He who could vault within the saddle
  Is lifted up to ride once more.
The hostler holds the stirrup, renders
  What aid the helpless form demands;
The bridle safely bound, he passes
  The reins into the rigid hands.
They tie him firmly, and Wunsch shivers,
  Yet quiet in his place he stands.
Does not that ghastly face seem living
  Illumined by the burning brands?
All 's hushed. Unbroken is the silence.
  The waiting mourners glance around,
But Paulus speaks no priestly blessing—
  Wulfhilde's sobs the only sound.
Then, baring his gray locks, the falconer
  Pronounces simply: "Huntsman, Hail!"
With nodding head the stallion answers;
  The hunters murmur: "Huntsman, Hail!"

Then slowly winding through the portal
  They move adown the darkened vale.
His sunken eyes fixed on the bridle
  The Count still leads them, stark and pale.

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Night wanderer of a wakeless slumber,
The grave's long dream enwraps him now;
His mettled steed no longer thrills him;
In vain the forest whispers low.
The lurid glare from smoking torches
On looming tree and shrub is shed,
And mid the playing lights and shadows
They tread their pathway with the dead.
But Gerhard soon disbands his escort,
And he and Bruno wend alone,
Attendant on the silent horseman,
To Willé's low and piteous moan.
Though night still broods o'er mead and woodland,
The undimmed stars all westering fly;
A mist o'er glen and lowland hovers
And, as they pass, floats wanly by.
Within its rolling masses marshalled,
In shadowy columns on the mere,
For grim pursuit of horse and rider,
Vague, shifting charnel shapes appear;
They stretch along in endless legions,
And on they surge, a spectral wave:
Spear-flingers, warriors, hunt companions,
A phantom escort to the grave.
The gray-horsed giant is not with them,
Nor is his consort in her place,
But all the countless forms, unlessened,
The Knight had met in his mad chase,

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Flit on in streaming files to join them;
  Their ghostly faces light with glee,
And fill with fiendish, mute exulting,
  Yet naught but mist the wardens see.
Persistently the spirits follow,
  As if they were upon their way
To spy the secret place of burial,
  And vanish at the break of day.

Aloft, upon a jutting hillside,
  Whence seas of crowding trees are seen—
Their crests on crests continuous rising,
  High scaling to the blue serene—
And, far below, the Bode glistening
  Through golden cornfields, silver white,
And steeples beckoning in the distance,
  Above a rugged granite height,
There is the grave. Upon its grasses
  Primeval oaks their shadows throw,
And towering o'er them all, gigantic,
  One mighty tree in lordly show
Uprears his monument befitting.
  Perchance more ancient than his race,
It mourns the dead and fearless hunter—
  The guardian of his resting-place;
Its roots will softly twine around him,
  And soon to his dark cell convey,
Repeating still in gentle murmurs,
  Whate'er the winds may have to say.

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'T will waken with each spring's returning,
And don its greenery anew;
Within will lodge the feathered songsters,
The azure sky a-glimmering through.
Its sheltering boughs will arch above him
To screen him from the summer sun,
And to his bed with summer's waning
Its leaves will flutter, one by one.

A thousand trees look on in witness,
Like grim, gray shadows hither led;
They bow their heads, with awe-struck whispers,
To hail the coming of the dead.
At last beneath the sullen rider,
The rooty soil gives hollow sound,
And Wunsch's hoof-beats sharply rustle
The leaves upon the littered ground.
The rocky, fissured brow now rises
From shrouding gloom into the light,
But dark the lowland shadows linger,
Maintaining still the reign of night.
A fearsome moaning fills the distance;
The wind plays with the dead man's hair;
Stout-hearted Gerhard sees the omen—
His frighted eyes in wonder stare;
He thinks distorted, leering faces
Malignly gaze from out the wood;
On gnarly trunks and crooked branches
He sees the hellish, goblin brood.

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But now a stag cries in the thicket,
As down it flies to seek the stream;
And at the welcome sound the hunter
Awakes as from a hideous dream.
The archer spreads the gathered branches,
And bearing reverently their dead,
In mantle wrapped, with bow and bugle,
They couch him on his leafy bed.
The handfuls three of earth they scatter,
Then fill the grave, and o'er it lay
Soft mosses green, and twining ivy,
And kneeling down, a blessing say.
The falconer rises from the grave-side,
Puts to his lips the hunting horn,
And from the mountain peaks re-echoed
A ringing ha-la-li is borne.
But as they pass the green-aisled columns,
And lead the stallion, homeward bound,
A long and piteous howl o'ertakes them,
Ear-piercing, from the new-made mound.
It is from Willé, desolate mourner,
His master and his friend lies there;
For love of him the noble mastiff
With lamentation fills the air.
No urgent call nor gentle coaxing
Will either move or comfort him;
He cowers down, his fate awaiting,
And tarries while his eyes grow dim.
In grateful service to his master

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He had devoted every breath,
So ended he where they had parted,
Unflinching, faithful unto death.

Day breaks anew and all its splendor
Upon a gladsome world is spent;
Above the wreath of green-clad mountains
Spreads out the blue, celestial tent.
Lone, on a rocky crest uplifted,
Where sunshine beats and tempests rave,
There lies above the restful valley
The forest-guarded hunter's grave.

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XIII

The Storming of the Castle

CRISP and chill the air of autumn
Steals upon the shores of summer;
Balmy zephyrs play no longer
Through the flowing, billowy foliage;
Boughs are tossed by whirring breezes,
And the limbs creak, snap and clatter,
As the shuddering winds drive through them.
Whirling leaves, frost-browned and crinkled,
Through the air drift scurrying downward,
And the shrubs, smooth-stemmed and barren,
Blaze with clustered, scarlet berries.

It was eve, and fires glimmered
In the valley of the Bode.
Round the flames lounged lawless peasants,
Roasting kine and calves, late pillaged
From the Convent Himmelgarten,
Quaffing wine—the monks' rare vintage—
Throwing dice for sacred treasure,

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Singing loud and ribald ditties.
All the vale below the castle
Was aswarm with bristling spear-heads,
Arquebuses, swords and maces.
Peaceful scythes, and picks, and mattocks,
Swung by oaken-fisted rustics
In their toilsome life of tilling,
Now were turned to deadly weapons.
Loud the drum and fife had sounded
In each village through the valley;
Bells had rung alarm and summons,
Calling men from every cottage—
Bondsmen, miners, free-born peasants,
Hungering, ill-conditioned people,
Strangely clad—a motley rabble.
Here came one in tattered smockfrock,
Knightly armor decked another,
There a cassock, patched and faded,
Here a doublet and slashed breeches,
Now a helmet,—now a bonnet.
Each new troop of eager comrades
Was received with lifted beakers
By the pushing, swaying masses,
And a rousing, jeering greeting:
"Welcome here, ye fellow-toilers!
Welcome, men of Hunger Valley,
Beggar Town and Never Harvest!
Have ye come to warm the Barons?
We will give them such a roasting

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As will scorch the Blessed Angels,
Perched upon the arching rainbow."
Where the banded Leaguers serried,
In the breeze a banner fluttered
With a strange device emblazoned.
On its folds a kneeling peasant
Wept beneath Christ's woeful passion;
Pope and Emperor, too, were pictured,
And, above them all, the League Shoe.
Bertram Volrat, as the chieftain
Of this crowding throng of rebels,
Proudly bore a gleaming halberd,
At his side a broadsword dangling,
On his head a battered morion.
Gloomy moved he, fierce, determined,
And his word found quick compliance.

Now he ordered that the drum-beat
Call his leaders to a council;
And to his assembled comrades
Volrat spoke: "Your summons sent I
To the castle gate, demanding
That they peacefully surrender,
Offering all but Hackelberend
Free withdrawal and safe conduct.
They defy us! Hence at sunrise
Do we storm the damnéd rook's nest!"
"Captain," rose a voice, " 't is rumored
That the Count is dead and buried!"

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"By God's beard, I 'll not believe it!
If the Devil had him safely,
They 'd surrender! Here! Ask Hartman!
It was he who bore the message,
And who saw him in his armor,
Striding up and down the bulwarks!
Nay!" and Volrat shouted fiercely,
"Common men to him are nothing;
Therefore nothing shall we grant him—
Naught but death,—and here I warn ye:
Let none dare to maim or slay him!
Mine is he—by right of justice!
Ye from Wendefurt and Stiege,
Altenbrook and Hasselfelde,
Who most suffer his oppression,
Be the first to storm,—I 'll lead ye!"
Waldtraut, who had joined her father,
When from Treseburg she vanished,
And now hovered ever near him,
Vainly sought to stay his purpose.
Tears she shed, and wild entreaties,
All were lost, like plaint of song bird
When the storm raves in the mountains.

Gloom held sway within the castle.
Gerhard, on the drear returning
With the archer from the burial,
Had scarce reached the court in safety,
When the preying peasant vultures

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Swooped upon the silent valley.
Paulus, Albrecht and Wulfhilde
In the Bergfried sat for counsel,
Low-voiced, solemn,—till the falconer,
Roughly bursting in upon them,
Brought them warning of their peril.
Quickly from his seat sprang Albrecht:
"Draw the bridge and bar the tower-gate!
Every man prepare for combat!"
At the words, the Abbot Paulus
Rose and strode across the chamber,
His blue eyes with fire flashing.
"Hold!" he cried, "I am the elder!
'T is for me to take command here!"
"You? Your Reverence?" stammered Albrecht,
"Honored be your robe and office,
Yet for war they 're illy suited!"
"Think you so?" the Abbot shouted,
"Know, bold youth, that he, who knighthood
Once resigned for holier orders,
Can resume his knightly standard
When the hour of need arises!
Knew I not the joy of warfare?—
Thrilling years spent in the saddle?
Joy of combat? Joy of struggle?
Albrecht, I am of thy station!
Once the friend and sworn companion
Of the Count Hans Hackelberend,

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Many a day I fought beside him
In the bloody Swabian battles!
I am Egon, Count of Hordorf!"
In amazement Gerhard started,
And with quavering lips addressed him:
"You, sir! You are Count of Hordorf?
Then for you I have a message,
That my lord, as he lay dying,
On my oath, bade me deliver."
"I have seen him, Gerhard. Silence!"
And the Abbot, smiling grimly,
Gave commandment to the falconer:
"Bring me forth thy master's armor;
Bring his sword and shield and helmet;—
That in his own casque and buckler
I may guard my foeman's castle!"
Quick of cross and cowl divested,
Clasped in steel, engirthed in armor,
Paulus stood,—the monk forgotten—
High-born knight and valiant warrior
Of the days of Maximilian.
Gazing on him, half in reverence,
Half exultant, loud they hailed him,
And each heart new-thrilled with courage.
Straight the clanging gate was bolted;
Arms were placed, and sheaves of arrows,
All along the inner ramparts,
While the warder from his outlook
Sharply scanned the massed invaders.

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At the close of day the summons
Was in terse, rude terms rejected,—
And the hush of night fell o'er them.
But about the hill beleaguered
Baleful campfires starred the valley,
Gleaming in the palling darkness
Like the glittering eyes of tigers,
Crouching low in hungry circle
Round their doomed and boding victims.

At the early break of morning,
O'er the fortress flew a missile
New and strange in all the region.
Thunderlike, and with an echo
From the mountains loud resounding,
Crashed a shot. The Bergfried shivered
As the ball of hurtling iron
Struck the mortared stones and tore them,
Falling with the crumbling rubbish.
In the night had come two sakers,
Dragged o'er trackless roads and byways,
And at dawn the chief of gunners
Flung his greeting at the castle.
No loud roar hurled back defiance:
Treseburg lay all defenceless
At the mercy of the cannon,
For the Count in stormy vehemence
Had proscribed the new-found weapons.
Strong in wrath and strong in numbers,

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Strong in musketoons and gunners,
Vantage all lay with the Leaguers.
In this pass of fateful peril,
Hackelberend's dauntless spirit
Woke within his gentle daughter.
Thrilled for desperate deeds of daring,
Forth she stood, her wistful features
Lighted with a noble purpose.
Bold, impassioned words broke from her:
"Harken ye, my friends and liegemen!
I shall join in battle with you
'Gainst this cruel horde of peasants!
I am Wulfhild'—name heroic—
Slayer of the savage wolf-brood!
Early did my father teach me
Well to aim the hissing arrow;
Yea,—the glancing spear to brandish.
Oft I 've donned the steel-linked corselet
Worn by her, my great ancestress,
Whose brave deeds still live in story.
Let me fight, and if I perish,
Be it, so it be among you!"
All aglow, her bosom heaving,
Straight and lithe, she stood intrepid.
Hordorf spoke with quick decision:
"Lady, no! Where men do battle
You have neither place nor duty.
Take you all the maids and women
And seek shelter in the Bergfried;—

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There rely on help from Heaven,
And on us, whose strength unfaltering
Will beat back this brutish rabble!"
Wulfhild', silent now and wavering,
Looked at Albrecht, supplicating.
Wonderingly he gazed upon her,
Gentle were his words and tender:
"Wulfhild', heed him,—as you love me!"
Hot and deep the mantling crimson
Flushed her throat and cheek and forehead;
Down she dropped her quivering lashes,
Swaying with a sudden faintness.
"As you love me! As you love me!"
Low her throbbing heart repeated,
"Did my eyes misprise his coldness?
Has his love thus spoken to me?"
And anew hope rose within her,
Though no word of lip betrayed it,
As she turned and joined the maidens.

Once again a knight defender,
Hordorf gave forth hurried orders,
And assigned to each his station,
While the host of howling peasants,
Mad with lust for blood and booty,
Swarming forward, swept on headlong.
Balls and arrows whirred and whistled,
Raucous jeers and shouts defiant
Rose midst crash of arquebuses.

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In the vale between long pauses
Loud the iron cannon thundered.
Little space for daring onslaught
Did the causeway dole the Leaguers,
'Neath the grim portcullised tower.
Halted by the trench, the peasants
Rolled down trunks of trees and boulders;
Spaded earth piled high within it,
And, to gain the fatal hillside,
Men below, fast rushing forward,
Men above drove to the slaughter,
Till their broken ranks were daunted
By the scores of dead and wounded.
Back they fell, their sakers muffled;
And the archers on the ramparts
Thought the fierce assault abandoned,
Cooled their heated brows, and resting
Gulped deep from the riméd tankards,
That the monks filled in the cellar,
Till again the battle thundered.

Heedless of his life, the collier
Pressed ahead, unharmed by arrows,
With command, rebuke, example
Urging on his flagging comrades,—
Stinging them with words like nettles—
Cunningly he fanned their rancor.
Forth they dashed in reckless onset,
Laying hold of stones and branches,

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Litter and the battle's débris,
Thus to fill the moat before them;
Then they hurled a hail of missiles
In blind fury at the castle.

Aiming calmly, the beleaguered
Rarely missed their hated targets,
For the doughty hunting comrades,
With the Abbot and his servants,
Were adroit and clear-eyed marksmen.
Ludolf, leaning from the rampart,
Suddenly withdrew his arrow
From the bowstring,—far below him,
From her shelter on the hillside,
Waldtraut's loving eyes had called him.
"Ludolf!" Gerhard cried out sharply,
"Go thou to yon lower turret,
Where thou canst not see thy maiden,
And let Velten here replace thee!"
Scarcely had they changed their stations,
When a shrieking ball of iron
Tore the battlement beneath him,
And laid low the luckless hostler.
Blazing in its wake a firebrand
Struck the high-perched wooden birdhouse;
Through its roof the flames burst fiercely,
And a dense, black smoke curled upward.
Loud without the foe exulted.
Volrat hushed their shouts and bellowed:

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"Yield ye now, Hans Hackelberend!"
"Never!" roared the warrior Abbot.
Wenzel clambered to the falcons,
To release them from their jesses,
And aloft they soared to freedom.
Now the moat was bridged and traversed,
And the ram's dull blows fell heavy
On the groaning, trembling tower-gate.
Axes rang, and sharpened mattocks
Shivered, split and tore the wood-work;
Oaken planks were rent asunder,
Beams gave way, and wrecked and shattered,
Half the ponderous gate sank crashing
Down into the tower's archway.

Bent on spoils, the crowding Leaguers,
Sweeping o'er the timbered wreckage,
Pressed into the court triumphant,
Where their valorous opponents,
Death-defying and determined,
Every foot of ground contested.
Clash of weapons still resounded
In a hopeless, vain resistance,
Till, by greater strength o'erpowered,
The defenders of the castle,
Scarce a man unscathed of body,
Yielded up the ancient stronghold.
In stern check the bloody collier
Held his men from further slaughter.

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Albrecht proudly scorned surrender,
When the peasants fell upon him,
And he fought on sorely wounded.
All alone the knightly Abbot
Wielded his sharp sword defiant,
Like the wild boar on his scutcheon.
None was able to subdue him.
Then it was that collier Volrat
Saw the Count's steel-gleaming armor.
"Hackelberend, I have found thee!"
With a bound he roared infuriate.
Desperate blows in deafening clangor
Rained from flashing sword and halberd,
Till the Abbot's arm dropped shattered.
With one mighty thrust the collier,
Breaking through the unguarded corselet,
Pierced his foe, who sank resistless,
From his head the helmet rolling.
Back the peasant fell astounded,
And anew his fury kindled.
"Where is Hackelberend?" cried he,
Bending o'er the bleeding body.
"Damned in Hell, where thou shalt find him!"
Breathed the dying Knight and Abbot.

Noisily the scuffling victors
Pillaged castle halls and chambers,
Seizing garments, armor, weapons,
Followed still by fire and ravage.

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Others sought the burning stables,
Where the plunging horses whinnied,
Maddened by the fiery turmoil.
Suddenly a cry of terror
Rose above the smoke and uproar.
Wunsch, from every hand escaping,
Sprang unbridled through the doorway.
Forward Volrat leaped to seize him;
But the stallion reared and, towering
Like some black, avenging demon,
With his iron-shod hoofs descended,
Smiting low the hapless collier.
Silently the strong man perished,
And the charger, bounding o'er him,
Scattered wide the plundering peasants,
And escaped from mortal bondage.

In the court's remotest corner,
Where an aspen's shadows quivered,
On the turf lay Albrecht dying;
Low beside him knelt Wulfhilde
All her grief and love outpouring.
Round them stood, a mourning circle,
Gerhard, Bruno, and Agnete;
While, her lover's arms about her,
Waldtraut watched afar, lamenting.
"Death absolves me of my silence"—
Wulfhild' sobbed, her pale lips trembling,—
"Albrecht, I have loved thee ever;

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O, so deep as not another
In the world could e'er have loved thee!
Take my heart to Heaven with thee,
For no earthly love shall claim it.
Fare thee well, O my belovéd!''
As on brow and lip she kissed him,
From his eyes the life-light faded,
But his fingers' feeble pressure
Made response to her avowal.
Round his mouth a smile still hovered,
And, like gentle Spring's suspiring,
His last whispering sigh was mingled
With the grieving breath of Autumn.
Wulfhild' cast herself upon him,
And lay weeping on his body,
Till the falconer, bending o'er her,
Spoke with patient, gentle urgence:
"Come, my lady! Come, I pray you!
Nobly did he yield his spirit;
Nobly let him rest and knightly!
Now to Bruno's care consign him;
Here your life is still in peril.
We, my dame and I, will guide you
Safe to Quedlinburg's fair chapter,
Where with mothering arms the Abbess,
Countess Stolberg, will receive you.''
Wulfhild' slowly rose, heart-stricken,
And with tear-drowned eyes and accents
Took a brief farewell of Waldtraut,

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And, supported by the falconer,
Passed forever from the castle.

Wending to the mountain summit
On the dear remembered pathway,
Wulfhild' turned, and, looking backward,
Gazed once more, through dimming tear-mists,
On loved wood and stream and meadow.
Safely had her home ancestral
Lain, a jewel, mountain-guarded;
But now lurid flames shot upward
From its casements, and she listened
To the distant savage shouting
And triumphal song of peasants.
Passing on—descending slowly—
Swarded plains lay green before them,—
Quedlinburg with silent steeples
Beckoning in the purpled distance.
While again she rested, wearied,
Suddenly, with wings a-whirring,
O'er her head her falcon circled,
Settling softly on her shoulder.
"Ah! Thou loyal friend and comrade!
Hast thou come to bring me solace?"
Wulfhild' sighed with fond caresses;
"Faithful shalt thou find thy welcome.
Bide thou with me now and ever,
Floating o'er me, like the memories
Of the days for aye departed!"

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XIV

The Wild Chase

NIGHT sinks upon the Bode valley;
The autumn air is dank and chill;
The timid stars seek hasty cover,
And murky clouds the heavens fill.
And lone it is; no stately castle
Now beckons from the distant height;
No gleaming casement yonder watches
From tower or hall with cheering light;
And through the silence of the forest
Is heard no peaceful strain of horn,
That in the past with lulling cadence
Each even down the vale was borne.
Where long a noble race had flourished
Within their rock-built citadel,
Who loved to roam with dog and falcon,
And in the chase dull care dispel;—
Now empty walls stare, bleak and blackened,
With gables desolate and drear—
Memorial sad of knights and ladies,

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Who lived and loved and feasted here.
Fair Treseburg, demolished, ruined,
Looms up a picture of decay,
A granite skeleton disjointed,
Gnawed bare by prowling beasts of prey.
The fire, by riot's torch enkindled,
Has riven massive walls of stone;
Devoured are oaken roof and rafters;
The crumbling tower stands alone.
The wind awakes and fans the embers,
Anew the vaulting flames blaze bright,
And through the lurid fiery billows
The glowing Bergfried cleaves the night.
Now smoke enwraps the smoldering ruins;
Its velvet cloak the havoc shrouds,
Till like a sable plume it rises,
And floating, curling, meets the clouds.
Faint glimmering through the ebon vapors
There peeps the sickle of the moon;
But its pale light soft wanes in hiding,
And eerie darkness settles down.
Whist figures fill the glooming shadows,—
Air-dwellers, bodiless and shy;
Now here, now there, they flit and beckon;
Then back into the darkness hie.
The rising storm-wind blows and blusters
Above each height and craggy wall;
Swift sailing from across the mountains
The clouds spread out a raven pall.

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The wood from revery awakening
No longer croons a slumber-song;
Its swaying boughs it sets aquiver,
And rustles its dark aisles along.
The storm drives on in boisterous anger,
The branches wildly toss and sway,
And yielding in a swirling tumult,
The darkling waves of leaves give way.
O Woden Wish-Wind, whose low whispers
In magic ope the flowers of spring,
Dost thou, returning in the autumn,
The fiercer tempests also bring?
The gale pursues its endless journey;
It hums and shrills as on it flies,
As if upon the earth came sweeping
Gigantic wings adown the skies.
Then, fearful in its pent-up fury,
Bursts forth the storm's exhaustless wrath;
A noise the sleeping dead to waken
Fills all the valley in its path.
The air is trembling, whirling, whizzing,
A levelling fiend it rushes by,
And evermore the roar increases,
The tempest howls and witches cry.
And through it all rise human voices,
But wild and weird above the wind,
As if in demolition's madness
All terrors dire had been combined,
And hurtled forth this night of frenzy

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From some mysterious hostile realm,
Against the earth and its existence,
E'en life itself to overwhelm.
There 's shouting, as of vaunted triumph,—
Shrill through the storm is heard the yell,—
Then follow groans of pain and anguish,
As if from tortured souls in Hell:
Distracting shrieks and husky croaking,
Ear-splitting, harsh, discordant song,
Moans, curses vile, and lamentations,
Derisive jeers—hoarse, loud and long;
Then finally the cries of hunting:
The bay of dogs, the horses' neigh,
While bugles out of tune add clamor
To fill a mortal with dismay.

High from the beetling Raven Ledges
The storm blasts down the valley rave;
They sweep along the crags of granite,
And whirl around a lonely grave.
Assembled are the tempest rulers,
Enshrouded in a misty veil,—
A multitude of surging figures,
That swarm throughout the wood and dale;
Night hunters they, who, skulking, loiter
In restless prowling o'er the spot,
As if impatiently they waited
To carry out some ghoulish plot.
They bend down o'er the mound and listen,

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Yet dare not touch it with their feet,
But dreadful are the words they utter,
As if but curses here were meet.
The oak strikes out its lusty branches
And lays about as with a sword,
To banish from the place of burial
The hideous, sacrilegious horde.
But after every stroke the phantoms
Return defiant as before,
While from the oak resounds a clangor
Like brazen bells amidst the roar:

Disturb not the buried!
For troubled and worried
Through life are poor mortals
Till Death interferes;
Hold sacred its portals
Till the trumpet he hears.
The doer of evil
On day of upheaval,
For sin and wrong dealing
Will judgment receive,
In vain then appealing
His doom to retrieve.
In peace let him lie!
His guardian am I!

The spirits listen, nod and whisper,
While lightly flitting to and fro,

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Like falling leaves in autumn breezes
That ever down and upward blow.
They form around the grave a circle,
In weird confusion dance and swing,
And, to their frantic manner suited,
Loud screech and howl the words they sing:

Hu-i-ho! He is ours!
We'll not let him go!
He's offended the powers
Who visit with woe.
His grave we discovered
Here under the oak;
Our homage we offered
Midst fire and smoke.
We'll make him our master
To lead in the chase,
And gallop the faster
Through limitless space.
To us he is bound,
Who've been under ground;
Let him be the first
Of all who are cursed,
To mount his wild horse
For ne'er-ending course!
Hu-i-hu-i! Awake!
Hu-i-hu-i! Awake!
Hu-i-ho! Hu-i! Hu-i-o!

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The tempest swells with demon fury;
  The world is shaken by the storm;
The oak is felled; the mountain trembles—
  And, lo! Again the Mighty Form!
Once more the ravens flutter round him;
  The wolves trot nigh with reeking breath—
A spear is thrust into the hillside—
  Then falls the solemn hush of death.
The mound above the grave has vanished,
  And slowly in the moon's pale shine
A knightly figure rises from it,
  Whose head dry leaves of oak entwine.
Devoid of life, tomb-blanched and shrunken,
  Ascends the ghostly Huntsman grim,
As, quickened by Hell's conjuration,
  The shadowy pit disgorges him.
Firm striding to his night-black stallion,
  He grasps the reins and vaults astride;
His hand drops quickly to the bugle—
  His lifeless eyes he opens wide—
An icy smile plays o'er his features—
  Upon his brow dwell gloom and scorn.

At touch of his spur the black courser fleets
    swiftly,
  A single shrill larum resounds from his horn;
On, onward he dashes, and after him, snorting,
  Comes storming and ravening from glen and
    from glade,

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From out the dense thicket, from rocks and deep caverns,
From clouds that float by, a most dismal parade
Of spectres on horseback, of graveyard companions,
Of outcasts and perjured, in villainy dyed;
With knives and with cudgels, with cross-bows and lances,
In armor and jerkin, and bear's shaggy hide;
The tortured, beheaded, racked, flayed and dismembered,
With limbs out of joint, with their necks wrenched askew,
With skulls that are grinning, and slashes wide gaping,
Malefactors and felons, a horrible crew.
The nags that they ride are rough-coated and frothing,
And drivelling curs at their heels fiercely tear;
They sling and hurl stones and they shoot with their cross-bows,
But missiles and arrows fall short in the air.
They scamper and gallop, race, struggle and jostle,
As if by avengers relentlessly chased—
Fast whirling and reeling and rushing and crowding—

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A villainous rabble in maddening haste.
They turn now, and twist like a scaly, huge dragon,
That wriggles and stretches an endless long tail,
And belches forth flames and hot sulphurous vapors,
With screaming and brawling, great clamor and wail.
As if the strong portals of Hell had been broken
By legions of demons, their freedom to gain,
Or like a wild avalanche, cleft from a glacier,
That crushing, resistless, bounds on to the plain—
At gallop now charges, with flourish of trumpets,
The Huntsman recalled from the chamber of death,
Still guiding the cohorts that follow behind him,
With game madly flying and panting for breath.
He towers o'er them all with the brow of a monarch,
The chief of the mountain, the ruler of night,
Who feared neither angels, nor man, nor the devil,
And rides, as when living, in reckless despite.
Ho! Hunting forever! He stands in the stirrups,

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Blows into his bugle and swings his long spear;
With reins hanging loosely he dashes off wildly,
And leads his rough hordes in their grewsome career.
Aloft in the track of the eagle they follow,
Veer round to the castle in mad, plunging flight,
Encircle the hill and the smoldering ruins,
And pitch in the gulf of the dismal, dark night.
Then fades out of sight the ineffable terror,
Its echoes still lingering, as onward it flies;
Now louder, now lower, now turning, now winding,
Until in the distance it finally dies.
Peace settles again, and the soft-sighing breezes
In cadences soothing the tumult bemoan;
They sing of the harvest, of acorns and berries,
Of birds and the flowers, all withered or flown.
But listen! The turmoil and din is returning,
And fast reapproaches the chaos and roar;
In unlessened horror the hillside ascending,
The menacing night-horde comes storming once more.
Midst luminous showers of sparkles and flashes,
It sweeps around tower and tottering wall,

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Then vanishes, wailing, in darkness and shadow,
The furious chase, with its leader and all.

The clouds in banks of tranquil splendor
Float calmly like a broadening stream,
And golden on the deep blue heaven
The stars with burnished lustre gleam.
The wood in nodding boughs still whispers
Of Wode and his conquering might,
And gently lulled to dreamy silence
It sleeps upon the breast of night.

Es grüne die Tanne, es wachse das Erz,
Gott schencke uns Allen ein fröhliches Herz!

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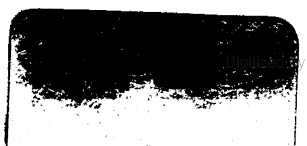
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